NATION

Officials changed property status: Goa club landowner

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Retail inflation rises to 0.71% in Nov on higher food prices

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Vaibhav powers India to a big 234-run win

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 13 DECEMBER 2025 | SATURDAY | BENGALURU | 21 JAMADIUL AKHIR, 1447 H | Vol 4 | Issue No 339 | Pages: 8

PHOTO: PTI

Nine killed as bus plunges into valley in Andhra Pradesh

CHINTUR, 12 DEC

Nine people lost their lives and 23 others were injured when a bus fell off a ghat road and overturned in Alluri Sitaramaraju district, Andhra Pradesh, early on Friday. The vehicle, en route to Telangana, was carrying 37 passengers, including the driver and the cleaner. Superintendent of Police Amit Bardar reported that the accident occurred around 4.30am near a Durga temple, likely due to the driver not noticing a curve amidst heavy fog. Four of the injured are in critical condition. Bardar noted, "We don't think the death toll will rise," while the bus was en route from Chittoor to the Sri Rama temple in Bhadrachalam. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed his sorrow at the incident. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Aeropark will come up despite land acquisition issue

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

Karnataka Industries Minister MB Patil has assured that the decision to abandon the acquisition of 1,777 acres in Devanahalli, spurred by farmers' protests, will not hinder the Aerospace & Defence Park project. "Just because one parcel of land had to be dropped doesn't mean it's a setback," he stated, emphasising that Bengaluru and surrounding areas are ideal for the sector. The minister highlighted ongoing developments in the Belagavi region and the potential of the Bengaluru-Mumbai Industrial Corridor for aerospace industries. Addressing concerns over industrial space in Belagavi, he said, "We have now identified a piece of land for an industrial park," enhancing the region's industrial prospects. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Rowdy sheeters must get SMS, not oral summons: HC

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

Karnataka High Court has mandated that police cannot issue oral summons to rowdy sheeters who are not presently involved in criminal activities. Instead, the court directed that summons should be communicated via SMS or WhatsApp.

Justice R Nataraj delivered the ruling on 4 December during a case brought by Sunil Kumar, a resident of Hebbal, Bengaluru, whose name is listed in the rowdy sheet. Kumar argued that continuous police visits and oral summons instilled fear of wrongful detention, violating his fundamental rights. His lawyer noted that apart from being listed, there were no pending cases against him. The State's argument that oral summons were commonplace and did not infringe upon rights was dismissed by the court. The court instructed rowdy sheeters to provide a mobile number for notifications, with the caveat that if they engage in criminal activity, police could visit their homes if they do not respond. *—PTI*

Cabinet okays Rs 11K cr for 2027 'digital' Census

Some states to have enumeration done in 2026

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved Rs 11,718 crore for conducting the Census of India, 2027, which would include the caste enumeration for the first time.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the proposal to conduct the Census which will be the first digital exercise. Around 30 lakh enumerators would be involved in the entire exercise.

The 16th edition of the Census since Independence will also provide an option of self-enumeration to citizens.

The decadal exercise which was scheduled to take place in 2021 got postponed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and had not been conducted since.

Vaishnaw said the Census will be conducted in two phases -- house-listing and housing census from April to September, 2026; and population enumeration (PE) in February 2027.

For Ladakh and snow-bound non-synchronous areas of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the PE exercise shall be conducted in September, 2026.

The Union government said the 2027 will be the first 'digital census', allowing people to self-enumerate. It will also be a caste census *PHOTO: ANI*

"This will become the first-ever digital census," Vaishnaw told reporters.

He said all personal data protection laws will be applicable. The Census 2027 will also capture caste data electronically in the PE phase. Data will be collected using mobile applications. Census-as-a-Service (CaaS) will deliver data to ministries in a clean, machine-readable and actionable format, Vaishnaw said. *—PTI*

MGNREGA renamed as PBGRY

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved a Bill to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and increase the number of work days, sources said. The scheme will now be renamed as 'Poojya Bapu Grameen Rozgar Yojna', and the number of workdays under it would be increased from 100 days at present to 125 days.

Cabinet says FDI in insurance hiked to 100%

In a bid to expand insurance penetration in the country, the Union Cabinet on Friday approved a bill to raise foreign direct investment in the insurance sector to 100 per cent, according to sources.

The bill may be introduced in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament, which is slated to conclude on 19 December.

The Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill 2025, which seeks to deepen penetration, accelerate growth and development of the insurance sector and enhance ease of doing business, is part of the 13 legislations listed for the ongoing session of Parliament. It is likely to be tabled on Monday. *—PTI*

LAST 2 DAYS

3 Days of Glamour, Craftsmanship & Unmatched Luxury

ASIA Jewels
Showcase of Fine Jewellery

BNR GOLD & DIAMONDS SINCE 1000

Discover Over 50,000+ Stunning Designs
All Under One Roof

Dec 12-13-14 2025

Shangri-La Bengaluru

Priceless & Most Beautiful Jewellery From India's Top 50 Jewellers

10:30AM - 8PM / FRI - SUN

Entry & Valet Parking Free / Scan For Venue Direction

FINE GOLD JEWELLERY | DIAMOND JEWELLERY PLATINUM JEWELLERY | TRADITIONAL JEWELLERY
WEDDING JEWELLERY | PRECIOUS STONE JEWELLERY | KUNDAN & POLKI JEWELLERY |LAB GROWN DIAMONDS

India eases visa norms for Chinese firms

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

India has revised its business visa regulations to facilitate the swift approval of visas for Chinese professionals visiting for short-term work. This move is part of ongoing efforts to improve relations between India and China, which have been strained due to the eastern Ladakh border dispute.

While the vetting process for all Chinese visa applicants remains unchanged, the previous issuance of employment visas, or "E" visas, which were valid for six months or more, has been replaced with business visas for shorter durations. Sources say all business visa applications will now be processed in three to four weeks.

This will help Chinese experts travel to India and provide technical support to companies utilising Chinese equipment.

In July, India resumed issuing tourist visas to Chinese nationals after a suspension due to the border tensions. Direct flights between the two resumed in October, and agreements have been made to facilitate border trade. *—PTI*

IIM-B placement panel resigns over recruitment 'scam'

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

The placement committee at IIM Bangalore has resigned over allegations that a recruitment clause was revoked to benefit its members, the institute said on Friday, adding the matter is "under internal review" in accordance with the Institute's process framework.

The 20-member placement committee stepped down on 10 December. In a letter to the Institute's Career Development Services and students, it said the decision was taken collectively, adding, "Support for all activities related to the Lateral and Final Placements Process 2026 from the Placement Committee stands suspended until further notice."

"Student well-being is paramount and central to the values which IIM Bangalore upholds," the institute added, without providing further details. The pre-placement process for lateral and final placements usually begins in December, with interviews for final placements scheduled for February every year.

Career Development Services are handled by 20 student representatives from postgraduate programmes under faculty members. *—PTI*

IndiGo operates 2,000 flights amid chaos

MUMBAI, 12 DEC

IndiGo operated over 2,000 flights on Friday as part of a revised "scaled down" schedule, following significant flight disruptions that began on 2 December. Under the winter schedule, which runs from late October to late March, the airline is permitted to operate 15,014 flights weekly, or 2,144 daily, on domestic routes.

An airline spokesperson said, "We have informed all our airport partners to publish the new flight schedules of the adjusted network... We are compliant (to all regulations)." However, the precise nature of the adjusted network has not been clarified amidst speculation about government-mandated reductions in the winter schedule.

Competition Commission of India (CCI) is examining if IndiGo violated competition norms due to its dominant market share of over 65 per cent. While no formal complaint has been lodged, concerns regarding potential abuse of dominance are under review. The CCI will assess factors including route dominance and operational practices. Meanwhile Indigo CEO was grilled by the DGCA probe panel for the second day. *—PTI*

> More on Page 4

2,500-PAGE CHARGESHEET

Zubeen's secy, bandmates among 4 charged with his murder

GUWAHATI, 12 DEC

The Special Investigation Team, probing the death of Zubeen Garg, charged four accused, including the singer's secretary Siddhartha Sharma and festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, with murder in the charge sheet filed in a court here on Friday.

Garg's band members, Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta, have also been charged with murder.

Shyamkanu Mahanta was the chief organiser of the North East India Festival, to attend which Garg had gone to Singapore, where he died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea on 19 September.

Speaking to reporters after submitting the 2,500 page chargesheet to the Chief Magistrate, Special DGP (CID) MP Gupta, heading the SIT team, said that Garg's cousin and suspended Assam police officer Sandipan Garg has been charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder. The singer's two personal security officers (PSOs) -- Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya -- have been charged with criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust by misappropriating funds.*—PTI*

SIT officials carrying a trunk that contains statements from nearly 300 individuals relate to the Zubeen Garg's death *PHOTO: PTI*

Ex-union home minister Shivraj Patil dies at 90

LATUR, 12 DEC

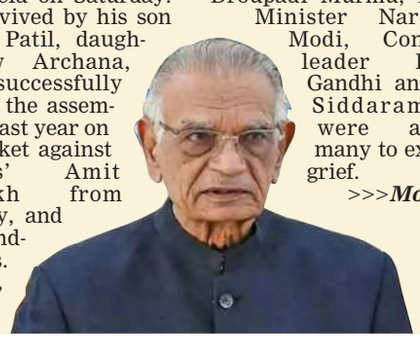
Veteran Congressman Shivraj Patil, who served as the Lok Sabha Speaker and was Union home minister during the 26/11 attacks, passed away at his hometown Latur in Maharashtra on Friday morning, family sources said.

Patil, 90, passed away at his residence 'Devghar' after a brief illness, they said, adding his funeral will be held on Saturday. He is survived by his son Shailesh Patil, daughter-in-law Archana, who unsuccessfully contested the assembly polls last year on a BJP ticket against Congress' Amit Deshmukh from Latur city, and two granddaughters.

Patil, who also served as the speaker of the Lok Sabha, remained a Congress and Nehru-Gandhi family loyalist till his last days and held several key constitutional and ministerial posts during a public life spanning more than five decades.

He was known for his dignified approach. Condolences poured in from across party lines, reflecting the wide respect the Congress politician commanded. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and CM Siddaramaiah were among many to express grief. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pg 3



K'taka forms team to fast-track Mekedatu project

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB/YOUTUBE

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

The State Government has issued an order forming a dedicated team under Karnataka Engineering Research Station (KERS) Director KG Mahesh to fast-track the Mekedatu project following what it described as a "favourable" Supreme Court order.

The Government Order, dated 11 December, shared with the media on Friday, states that the new committee will include the Deputy Chief Engineer and other KERS staff, operating from a project office to be established in Ramanagara. The decision follows a meeting held on 18 November under Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, where officials resolved to set up an office of the Superintending Engineer exclusively for Mekedatu. As formal finance approvals for staffing and infrastructure are pending, the responsibility has been temporarily assigned to the KERS Director.

According to the order, the team will include an executive engineer, three technical assistants, six assistant engineers, a superintendent, an accountant and other support staff. Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited (CNNL) has been tasked with setting up the project office and covering administrative expenses. CNNL's Director has also been instructed to transfer all relevant project documents to KERS. On 13 November, the SC dismissed Tamil Nadu's plea against Mekedatu as "premature," noting that final clearance would follow inputs from the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee and the Cauvery Water Management Authority. The Mekedatu balancing reservoir is designed to supply drinking water to the Bengaluru region and generate about 400 MW of power. —*Salar News*

Bomb threat mails target Kolar & Bidar DC offices

KOLAR/BIDAR, 12 DEC

Bomb threats emailed to the Deputy Commissioners' offices in Kolar and Bidar triggered evacuations and extensive security checks on Friday. The mail, sent from an Outlook account, warned that explosives had been placed in both buildings and claimed five RDX IEDs were set to explode before 2pm. In Kolar, the message—posted around 6am, was noticed only at 2.15pm, prompting police, bomb disposal teams, sniffer dogs and fire personnel to clear the premises and conduct a three-hour search. No suspicious objects were found. A similar threat reached the Bidar DC Office in Chikkapete, where security teams carried out a full sweep with negative results. Police termed the emails a hoax intended to create panic —***Salar News***

PHOTO: SALAR

Man held with exotic monkeys at B'luru airport

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

A passenger arriving from Bangkok at Kempegowda International Airport was arrested on 10 December for allegedly smuggling two endangered Red-Shanked Douc monkeys, though officials have not disclosed the suspect's identity. Bengaluru Customs announced the rescue and arrest on X through its handle @blrcustoms, stating that the passenger had concealed the primates in checked-in baggage. The Red-Shanked Douc (Pygathrix nemaeus) is known as one of the world's most colourful monkey species. —***PTI***

6 arrested with 8kg ganja in Tumakuru

TUMAKURU , 12 DEC

Six people were arrested for alleged drug peddling, with authorities seizing 8kg of ganja and 12 grams of MDMA, valued at Rs 11 lakh. Police also seized two cars worth Rs 14 lakh that were allegedly used in the illegal trade. The arrests were made on 10 December following a tip-off. The case was registered at Tilak Park police station under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. Tumakuru Superintendent of Police Ashok K V said the narcotics were being illegally transported from Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra to Tumakuru via Andhra Pradesh. Students and labourers were among the key targets in the distribution chain, with drugs allegedly being sold near school and college premises. —***PTI***

As spl court denies bail, Congress MLA Kulkarni moves HC

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

Congress MLA Vinay Kulkarni, an accused in the 2016 murder of a BJP worker, approached the Karnataka High Court challenging the Special Court for People's Representatives' order denying him bail. Justice S Sunil Dutt Yadav's bench heard Kulkarni's petition on Thursday. Senior advocate CV Nagesh, appearing for Kulkarni, argued that most eyewitnesses had turned hostile and therefore "there is no need to keep the petitioner in custody. So bail should be granted." The CBI counsel sought time to file objections. The court adjourned the hearing to 18 December. Yogesh Gowda, a BJP zilla panchayat member, was murdered on 15 June, 2016, in Dharwad. In September 2019, the State government handed over the case to the CBI. In November 2020, the CBI arrested prime accused Kulkarni. —***PTI***

44,000 farmers didn't get compensation due to glitches

Revenue Minister blames Aadhaar-name mismatches

BELAGAVI, 12 DEC

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda informed the Legislative Council that 44,208 farmers have not received compensation for rain and flood-related crop loss due to technical mismatches in official records.

Gowda was responding to a question raised by MLC Thippannappa Kamakanur on Friday, who pointed out that many flood-hit people in Kalaburagi district have not received any compensation.

"About three per cent farmers have not received any compensation. The reason is mismatch in the names. Their name in Aadhaar didn't match with the name in the agriculture department," Gowda said.

Gowda said that Kalaburagi district had reported crop loss in 3.23 lakh hectare, for which Rs 250.97 crore has been given as per State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) norms.

Statewide, he said, 14.21 lakh farmers were affected by floods. —*PTI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Leader of Opposition R Ashoka clash in Belagavi's Suvarna Vidhana Soudha on Friday

PHOTO: SALAR

Hebbalkar is lying about Gruha Lakshmi: BJP

BELAGAVI, 12 DEC

The Opposition BJP in the accused Minister of Women and Child Development, Laxmi Hebbalkar, of providing "wrong information" regarding the Gruha Lakshmi scheme funds.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka claimed Hebbalkar said funds were cleared till August, even though officials' letters from Dharwad, Gadag, and Haveri districts confirmed the amounts for February and March were not released. Ashoka demanded action against the minister for "disrespecting the House."

"Is there no one to question," Ashoka asked. "The Chair at least should question the Ministers. What punishment will the Chair give to the minister for giving wrong

answers....there seems to be a confusion in this government. I want to tell the Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah) to cut the night dinner meetings at least for 10 days. Let the Home Minister (G Parameshwara) ensure that dinner places are locked, at least the House will function properly then."

Siddaramaiah intervened, assuring that the pending Gruha Lakshmi funds would be credited immediately and that Hebbalkar would issue a clarification on Monday.—*PTI*

No land, no problem for aerospace park

BELAGAVI, 12 DEC

Industries Minister MB Patil on Friday told the Assembly that the State government's decision to drop acquisition of 1,777 acres in Devanahalli near Bengaluru, following farmers' protests, will not be a setback to the Aerospace & Defence Park project there.

He pointed out that Karnataka contributes 65 per cent of India's aerospace and defence output and globally the state is considered the third largest ecosystem.

The Minister was replying to a question by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Arvind Bellad during the Question Hour. The BJP MLA demanded that the government relocate the Aerospace & Defence

Park to a place between Belagavi and Hubballi-Dharwad.

The Karnataka government has declared 1,777 acres of land across 13 villages in Channarayapatna hobli, Devanahalli taluk, as a "Permanent Special Agricultural Zone." Long protests by farmers had led the government to drop the land acquisition plan.

"Just because one parcel of land had to be dropped (from acquisition) doesn't mean it's a setback. There is a growing demand in Bengaluru and surrounding regions, including Kolar, so we will have it there," Patil said.

Bengaluru, Bengaluru Rural, Kolar and Chikkaballapur region is a "natural ecosystem" for the aerospace and defence sectors, he said.

Pointing out that there is no industrial corridor in Belagavi, Patil said, during a recent roadshow in Pune, he was asked to provide industrial space in Belagavi by some big industry.

"We have now identified a piece of land for an industrial park," he said. —*PTI*

Demolished houses of drug peddlers: HM

Home Minister G Parameshwara said that the government has launched an uncompromising crackdown on the drug menace, including demolition of properties. "We have gone to the extent of demolishing the rented building." He added many African students who were caught want cases registered against them so they cannot be deported. Former Union Finance minister P Chidambaram said he hoped Karnatka wasn't like Uttar Pradesh.

'Matches in Chinnaswammy for pride'

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday said his government had acted to safeguard Bengaluru's reputation by permitting cricket matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium. The State cabinet has cleared the way for Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) to host international and IPL matches at M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, subject to compliance with the safety and security requirements.

'Hate speech bill is to silence critics'

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi alleged that the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crime (Prevention) Bill is designed to "silence critics" and "shield" itself from accountability. "A 10-year jail term for 'hate speech'? Is this to curb hate speech or to curb freedom of speech itself?" JD(S) leader Nikhil Kumaraswamy alleged the bill was not the Congress' State leaders' idea.

Minister warns land scammers

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told the Council on Friday that criminal proceedings and departmental action would be initiated against officials and land mafia involved in the illegal grant of 'Bagair Hukum' land. "We cannot tolerate illegally granting government land to land grabbers. 98 people in Chikkanayakanahalli taluk were issued cultivation certificates in the names of farmers. An FIR has already been filed."

'DON'T MOVE OUR COLLEGE'

Long Live Students' Unity
The children of Farmers & workers rely on Govt RC College & Govt Arts College we won't let them be converted into constituent colleges!
No to Sale of Education!
SAVE Govt RC Govt Arts College's!
AIDSO
BCU

All India Democratic Students' Organisation protests against the State government's proposal to move RC College and Government Arts College, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Friday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

'No politics behind dinner meets'

BELAGAVI, 12 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday dismissed reports that his recent dinner engagements with Congress legislators were politically motivated, insisting the gatherings were purely personal.

Addressing reporters in Belagavi, he said he frequently accepts informal invitations from long-time associates out of courtesy, not political calculation.

"Friends from the region affectionately call me for lunch or dinner.

"How can I say no? It was not any dinner meet," he said, clarifying that a meal with MLAs on the city's outskirts was simply at the home of acquaintances who had long invited him.

Shivakumar's clarification came amid speculation after over 30 Congress legislators, including ministers and two expelled BJP MLAs, reportedly attended a dinner on Thursday night.

The meeting followed a separate dinner hosted a day earlier for CM Siddaramaiah and his close aides, fuelling talk of renewed tensions over a supposed power-sharing arrangement between the two leaders.

Dismissing such speculation, Shivakumar said he would not "forget his Congress family" and reiterated there was no political agenda.

He was also set to fly to New Delhi, which he said was for the 'vote chori' campaign. Siddaramaiah said he hadn't been invited. —*Agencies*

- Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar dismissed reports that his recent dinner engagements with Congress legislators were politically motivated

DKS will become CM after Winter Session: Cong MLA

BELAGAVI, 12 DEC

Congress MLA Iqbal Hussain said that DK Shivakumar will become the chief minister after the legislature's winter session.

MLA Iqbal Hussein, who represents Ramanagara, was among the ministers and legislators who met for dinner along with Shivakumar late last night.

"All MLAs have come for the session. It is a rare opportunity for us to meet. We had dinner. Can dining together be called a show of strength?" Hussain told reporters here on Friday when asked about the dinner meeting.

On whether Shivakumar gave any good news, he said, "I'm giving the good news. He will become the CM after the session." Regarding his statements that Shivakumar will become the CM if it is written in his fate, Hussain said.

—*Salar* News

DEATH ON THE SPOT

Ex-neta HM Revanna's son's SUV kills biker

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

A 27-year-old man died when his two-wheeler collided with an SUV near a toll booth in Magadi, police said on Friday.

The deceased, identified as Rajesh, was working in a private firm here and hailed from Magadi taluk in Bengaluru South district, they said.

Police said the accident occurred at around 10.30 pm on 11 December. Rajesh was on his way home when his two-wheeler collided head-on with the SUV registered in the name of Shashank Revanna, the son of former minister HM Revanna.

The deceased Rajesh; HM Revanna's son Shashank Revanna

The impact of the crash was so severe that Rajesh died on the spot. Both the vehicles involved in the accident have been seized, and an investigation is underway to determine who was driving the SUV at the time of the accident.

"The car is registered in the name of Shashank Revanna," he said. "We have registered a case, but we have to ascertain who was driving the car at the time of the accident. We are checking if the driver was behind the wheel or the owner," he said. —*PTI*

- Police said the accident occurred at around 10.30 pm on 11 December. Rajesh was on his way home when his two-wheeler collided head-on with the SUV registered in the name of Shashank Revanna, the son of former Minister HM Revanna.

Leopard cub found in car at Ch'ballapur police stn

GUDIBANDE, 12 DEC

A leopard cub was found hidden inside a car on the premises of the Gudibande Police Station in Chikkaballapur district. Around 1.30 pm, a Gudibande constable spotted the cub moving near his residential quarters next to the station. The constable initially did not intervene, observing whether the cub's mother was nearby. However, within a short time, the cub vanished from sight, prompting the constable to alert other officers. A search was launched for the animal, said Munikrishna D.H., Circle Inspector.

The cub was later spotted sitting in the back seat of a seized car. Munikrishna noted that the animal appeared

exhausted. As people peered through the glass, the cub burrowed under the seat. Police alerted the Forest Department, which covered the car with a net to prevent escape and prepared to tranquilise the animal for safe capture. The Circle Inspector said the forest authorities will relocate the cub to Bannerghatta National Park. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Anna Hazare declares fast over Lokayukta Act

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Social activist Anna Hazare has declared an indefinite hunger strike in Ralegan Siddhi, Maharashtra, starting 30 January, citing the state government's failure to implement the Lokayukta Act. Dubbed the "final agitation," he stressed the law's importance for public welfare, claiming it has been neglected for years. His previous hunger strike in 2022 resulted in the formation of a committee and the passage of the legislation, yet Hazare lamented its lack of implementation. "I wrote seven letters to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, yet no response came. A government is meant for public welfare, not for mere display," he stated. Hazare previously gained national attention during the India Against Corruption movement in 2011. *—AGENCIES*

Gurpreet Sekhon held ahead of Punjab local polls

FEROZEPUR, 12 DEC

Ahead of the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections, gangster-turned-politician Gurpreet Singh Sekhon was taken into police custody as a "preventive measure". Two of his family members are contesting as Independent candidates from Ferozeshah and Bazidpur, backed by the Shiromani Akali Dal. Sekhon was arrested late on Thursday, prompting supporters to protest outside Kulgarhi police station, block the Ferozepur-Ludhiana road, and raise slogans against police and the AAP government. Deputy Superintendent of Police Karan Sharma said Sekhon and two accomplices were arrested as a precaution and would be produced in SDM court. The elections are scheduled for 14 December, with counting three days later. *—PTI*

10 Naxalites surrender in Chh'garh's Sukma

SUKMA, 12 DEC

10 Naxalites, including six women, surrendered in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh, police said on Friday, carrying a total bounty of Rs 33 lakh. The group handed over an AK-47, two Self-Loading Rifles, a Stengun, and a Barrel Grenade Launcher, with a combined reward of Rs 8 lakh. Among them, Midiam Bhima, a 30-year-old company platoon commander, had a Rs 8 lakh bounty, while Ganga Kunjam, Lekam Rama, Tati Soni, and Shanti Sodhi carried Rs 5 lakh each. The remaining five had bounties of Rs 1 lakh each. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/AMITSHAH

Andamans: Shah, Bhagwat unveil statue of Savarkar

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, 12 DEC

Union Home Secretary Amit Shah and RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday unveiled a statue of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar at Beodnabad in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Installed in a park in South Andaman, the ceremony was followed by both leaders planting Rudraksha trees. They were received by Lt Governor DK Joshi. Shah and Bhagwat then travelled to the BR Ambedkar Institute of Technology in Sri Vijaya Puram for the release of a song on Savarkar, marking 115 years of his iconic poem Sagara Pran Talamala. Savarkar was imprisoned in the nearby Cellular Jail in 1911. Shah is expected to leave later on Friday. *—PTI*

RaGa seeks discussion in LS on air pollution

Gandhi claims govt's narrative on SIR, Vande Mataram is shredded to pieces by the Oppn

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Friday said major cities across the country were living under a blanket of poisonous air, and sought a discussion on the issue of air pollution in Lok Sabha.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour, Gandhi said the issue was not an ideological one and urged the government to frame a discussion in such a manner that the opposition and treasury benches can find a solution to the problem instead of trading abuses.

"We should have a detailed discussion in Parliament on this, and the prime minister should put in place a methodical, systematic plan for each city—one that can, over the next 5 or 10 years, make life easier for our people," Gandhi said.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said the government was ready for a discussion on the issue and the Business Advisory Committee of the Lok Sabha can allot time for the same.

"Most of our major cities are living under a blanket of poisonous air. Millions of children are getting lung disease. Their future is being destroyed. People are getting cancer. Older people are struggling to breathe," Gandhi said.

He said it was important for the government to develop a plan to get rid of air pollution in cities.

Additionally, Gandhi hailed his party MPs' performance during the debates in both Houses on Vande Mataram and election reforms, and claimed that the government's narrative was shredded to pieces by the opposition.

Gandhi, chaired a meeting with Congress MPs in the Lower House and also heard the views of the party legislators besides taking their feedback.

During the meeting, Gandhi told party MPs that the government seemed "under pressure" from the opposition on both the issues, sources said.

He claimed that Union Home Minister Amit Shah was disturbed during the SIR debate and even used an abusive word in Parliament. *—PTI*

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi speaks in the House during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

- Additionally, Gandhi hailed his party MPs' performance during the debates in both Houses on Vande Mataram and election reforms, and claimed that the government's narrative was shredded to pieces by the opposition.

Usha urges govt to make anti-doping kits

Indian Olympic Association President (IOA) and Rajya Sabha member **PT Usha** on Friday urged the central government to promote production of indigenous anti-doping testing kits under the 'Make in India' initiative, saying that it will not only reduce cost but also increase transparency. Usha said that having to import testing kits causes delayed results and dependency on "external agencies". Two Swiss companies, Berlinger and LockCon, are the major suppliers of these testing kits to India right now, according to a source. India ranks poorly in tackling the menace and regularly features in the global top five of dope offenders. *—PTI*

MEA responds to foreign remarks on 'internal issues'

"A few foreign leaders have commented on India's internal issues," said the Minister of State for External Affairs, S Jaishankar about the international reports & remarks on social harmony by foreign leaders. "The government has taken note of reports, including on the internal situation in the country," he said. *—PTI*

'MGNREGS provides average of 50 days work per house'

An average of 50 days of employment per household was provided under MGNREGS over the past five years, Minister of State for Rural Development Kamlesh Paswan told RS. The scheme guarantees up to 100 days of employment per financial year to each household whose adults volunteer for unskilled manual work. *—PTI*

85,01,486 MISMATCHES

The ongoing cross-checking process has uncovered numerous 'logical discrepancies' in the voter data *PHOTO: PTI/SCREENGRAB*

1st phase of WB SIR flags major inconsistencies

KOLKATA, 12 DEC

The first phase of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal has exposed widespread inconsistencies, particularly in identifying new voters based on parentage and family mapping from the 2002 rolls, prompting the Election Commission (EC) to order a detailed verification of enumeration forms, an official said on Friday.

The ongoing cross-checking process has uncovered numerous "logical discrepancies" in the voter data, a well-placed source in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) claimed."Names of fathers are incorrect or mismatched in 85,01,486 cases, accounting for 11.09 per cent of the total voters," he alleged.

Also, 24,21,133 voters are listed as having more than six children, and inconsistencies have been observed in age differences related to parents, he said. In 11,95,230 cases, the age gap between a voter and their parents is less than 15 years, while in 8,77,736 cases, it exceeds 50 years, which is considered unrealistic.

Discrepancies also extend to extended family relationships, with 3,29,152 cases showing an age difference of less than 40 years with grandparents, causing confusion over familial links.

"Additionally, 20,74,256 voters over the age of 45 have been incorrectly marked as 'new voters'. Errors have also been detected in gender data, with 13,46,918 entries recorded incorrectly, raising concerns about voter identification accuracy," he said. The poll body has digitised all application forms and confirmed that affected voters will be called for hearings to verify and correct their records. *—PTI*

- 24,21,133 voters are listed as having more than six children, and inconsistencies have been observed in age differences related to parents

President Murmu pushes for peace, unity in Manipur

IMPHAL, 12 DEC

President Droupadi Murmu urged the communities of Manipur to strive for peace, understanding, and reconciliation during a reception programme in Senapati district on Friday. Emphasising the Union government's commitment to the welfare and development of the state, she expressed her delight at being in a region celebrated for its rich tribal heritage.

Murmu remarked, "Today the nation commemorates the Nupi Lal Memorial Day, which is the prime example of the female voice in bringing about positive social change." She highlighted Manipur's diverse cultural landscape, which is especially prominent in Senapati, expressing gratitude for the warm welcome she received from the tribal representatives in Taphou Naga village and meeting with displaced persons.

The President acknowledged the Maram tribe, identified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, stating, "The unique culture of Maram contributes to India's tribal diversity." She underscored that the development and empowerment of Manipur's tribal communities is a national priority, noting the government's focus on ensuring that development reaches every corner, particularly remote tribal regions.

Murmu highlighted recent investments in Manipur's hill districts, mentioning infrastructure improvements in healthcare, education, and basic services.

Following her address, she inaugurated and laid foundation stones for several development projects. *—PTI*

President Droupadi Murmu pays tribute at a memorial on the occasion of the 86th Nupi Lal Day, which commemorates two women-led movements against the British, in Imphal, Manipur *PHOTO: PTI*

India's Russian crude buys hit 5-month high in November

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

India's imports of Russian crude oil rose 4 per cent in November to a five-month high of Euro 2.6 billion, with a significant share of fuels refined from these barrels exported to Australia, according to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) report.

India remained the second-largest buyer of Russian fossil fuels after China, which accounted for 47 per cent of Moscow's crude exports. India purchased 38 per cent.

CREA said the rise came despite stable overall import volumes and may continue in December as cargoes loaded before US sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil, effective 22 October, arrive.

The sanctions prompted private refiners, including Reliance Industries and HPCL, to pause purchases, while Indian Oil Corporation continued buying from non-sanctioned suppliers.

State-owned refiners increased Russian crude intake by 22 per cent in November, lifting Russia's share to about 35 per cent of India's total crude imports.

CREA said refineries in India and Turkiye exported Euro 807 million worth of products partly refined from Russian crude. *—PTI*

Govt responds to RaGa on CIC appointments

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Government sources have rebuffed claims by opposition leader Rahul Gandhi regarding the representation of disadvantaged groups in the recent shortlist for the Central Information Commission (CIC). Gandhi had expressed his dissent during a meeting of a three-member committee comprised of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and himself, which took place on Wednesday.

Sources from the government stated that the panel had recommended eight names for the vacancies.

They confirmed that the finalised list included one representative each from the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), a minority community, and a woman.

They also said that during the UPA government's tenure from 2005 to 2014, there were no appointments from the SC/ST communities. *—PTI*

OVER 5 DECADES OF PUBLIC LIFE

Shivraj Patil: Cong loyalist who quit after 26/11

LATUR, 12 DEC

Veteran Congressman Shivraj Patil, who served as the Lok Sabha Speaker and was Union Home Minister during the 26/11 attacks, passed away at his hometown Latur in Maharashtra on Friday morning, family sources said.

He is survived by his son Shailesh Patil, daughter-in-law Archana, who unsuccessfully contested the assembly polls last year on a BJP ticket against Congress' Amit Deshmukh from Latur city, and two granddaughters.

Shivraj remained a Congress and Nehru-Gandhi family loyalist till his last days and held several key constitutional and ministerial posts during a public life spanning more than five decades.

The veteran politician faced severe public and media backlash as Union Home Minister in 2008 when he was seen in three different sets of clothes on the night of 26 November when Mumbai was facing unprecedented attacks from ten heavily-armed Pakistan-trained terrorists.

Defending himself over the criticism, he had said people should criticise policy, not clothes. The sheer scale of the Mumbai attacks weighed heavily on Patil's political career and made his position in the Union Cabinet virtually untenable, leading to his resignation on 30 November, 2008.

Born on 12 October, 1935, Patil began his political journey as the president of Latur municipality between 1966 and 1970 and was subsequently elected as an MLA for two terms. He held key posts in the Maharashtra assembly, including Deputy Speaker and Speaker, between 1977 and 1979.

He then went on to win the Latur Lok Sabha seat seven times and was the 10th Speaker of the Lok Sabha from 1991 to 1996. He lost to BJP's Rupatai Patil Nilangekar in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections.

He was also a Rajya Sabha member.

The Congress leader held several key portfolios in the Union Cabinet, including Home, Defence, Commerce, and Science and Technology. Patil was the Governor of Punjab and also served as Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh from 2010 to 2015.

In 2022, speaking at a book launch, he courted controversy for claiming that the concept of "jihad" was present not just in Islam but also in the Bhagavad Gita and Christianity. *—PTI*

Shivraj Patil *PHOTO:ANI*

- The veteran politician faced severe public and media backlash as Union Home Minister in 2008 when he was seen in three different sets of clothes on the night of 26 Nov when Mumbai was facing unprecedented attacks

Kavitha vows to become CM; will probe 'injustices'

HYDERABAD, 12 DEC

K Kavitha, a suspended MLC of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), has vowed to become Chief Minister and investigate alleged corruption and injustices committed since the formation of Telangana in 2014. Accusing both the BRS and ruling Congress of "corruption and irregularities", she dismissed claims from BRS leaders concerning her husband's involvement, branding it a "smear campaign".

"One hundred per cent, the industrial lands given on lease by the government were selectively handed over to private individuals in the BRS government," she stated, asserting that the truth would reveal who was behind these acts.

Kavitha also took aim at Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, who, she claimed, remains silent on corruption despite coming to power by condemning the BRS. She suggested this silence stems from his connections with beneficiaries of alleged irregularities. *—PTI*

56 ex-judges condemn Madras HC judge's impeachment

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Fifty-six former judges have united to denounce attempts by the DMK to impeach Justice GR Swaminathan of the Madras High Court, branding the move a "brazen attempt to browbeat judges."

This statement comes following Justice Swaminathan's controversial ruling on 1 December, which mandated that Arulmighu Subramania Swamy Temple light a lamp at the Deepathoon, asserting that it would not infringe upon the rights of the adjacent dargah or Muslim community. On 9 December, opposition MPs led by the DMK submitted a notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla seeking judge's removal.

The ex-judges' statement described the attempts as part of a "troubling pattern" in which political factions seek to intimidate the judiciary when outcomes do not align with their interests. "It strikes at the heart of judicial independence and the basic norms of constitutional democracy," they said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Sabarimala case: TDB President denied bail

KOLLAM, 12 DEC

A Kerala court on Friday rejected the bail plea of former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) President and ex-CPI(M) MLA A Padmakumar in the case of missing gold from the Sabarimala temple's sanctum sanctorum door frames. The Kollam Vigilance Court dismissed his request after prosecutors argued there was sufficient evidence against him, despite his claims of age-related health issues. Padmakumar was recently named an accused in the investigation. Meanwhile, prime accused Unnikrishnan Potty has applied for regular bail, saying the 60-day custody period without a chargesheet has expired and claiming he did not know the plates he handled were gold. The court has sought a report from the SIT and will consider his plea on 18 December. *—PTI*

J&K lost 7,000 Waqf properties last year: Mufti

SRINAGAR, 12 DEC

PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti on Friday claimed that Jammu and Kashmir has lost more than 7,000 registered Waqf properties in the past year, calling it the "latest blow" to Muslims. Citing data from the national UMEED Waqf database, she said over 3.55 lakh Waqf properties are unaccounted for across India, with J&K alone showing a drop of 7,240 entries. According to figures she shared, J&K listed 32,533 Waqf properties on 9 December, 2024, but this fell to 25,293 by 7 December this year. Mufti said the disappearance of these assets, alongside on-going violence and demolitions, raises serious concerns about transparency and the protection of Muslim community property. *—PTI*

Ponzi scam: ED attached Rs 17 crore assets

SHILLONG, 12 DEC

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached assets worth Rs 17.91 crore in connection with a nationwide Ponzi scheme run through the fake investment website Pearl vine International. The action, carried out on 10 December by the ED's Shillong Sub-Zonal Office under the PMLA, covers 13 immovable properties and seven movable assets, including several luxury cars allegedly bought with illicit funds. Pearl vine International, falsely presented as a US-based firm, drew investors with attractive schemes, charging a minimum membership fee of Rs 2,250 and claiming over 80 lakh members by 2022. Neeraj Kumar Gupta has been identified as the scheme's mastermind. *—PTI*

ED raids locations linked to UP cough syrup racket

LUCKNOW, 12 DEC

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday raided locations in various states in connection with a money laundering probe into a codeine-based cough syrup (CBCS) racket in Uttar Pradesh. The searches covered 25 premises in Lucknow, Varanasi, Jaunpur and Saharanpur apart from Ranchi and Ahmedabad. The locations covered include those of "absconding" main accused Shubham Jaiswal, his CA Vishnu Aggarwal, associates Alok Singh (a dismissed UP constable), Amit Singh, Vishal Singh and the shops of manufacturers and distributors of CBCS. ED officials estimated the proceeds of crime at around Rs 1,000 crore. Shubham Jaiswal is understood to have fled to Dubai while his father Bhola Prasad Jaiswal was arrested by the UP Police while trying to flee abroad. *—PTI*

Officials changed property status: Goa club landowner

Says officials changed salt pan land into a settlement zone

PANAJI, 12 DEC

A man, who claims to be the original owner of the land on which fire-ravaged 'Birch by Romeo Lane' stood, has alleged that a portion of his property was converted from a salt pan to a settlement zone without his knowledge, to benefit the club.

Pradeep Ghadi Amonkar said he had signed a sale agreement with Surinder Kumar Khosla in 2004, but it was withdrawn within six months as he did not receive the payment. Kholsa set up a nightclub on the land, and it was later taken over by Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra, owners of Birch by Romeo Lane.

A blaze swept through the nightclub at Arpora village in North Goa around midnight on 6 December, killing 25 people, most of them staff and a few tourists.

Amonkar said he is fighting a court battle against Khosla over the land.

Luthra brothers Gaurav (centre); and Saurabh (right) were detained by Thailand police after they fled India following the blaze at their Goa nightclub 'Birch by Romeo Lane' PHOTO: PTI

"For 21 years, I have been fighting in courts to get back my land in Arpora, which has been wrongfully occupied," he said.

While the case is proceeding, Amonkar said he has now learnt about a new development. "The government quietly changed the zoning of my land without informing me," he said.

Amid the ongoing litigation, he said no notice was served to him concerning the zone change.

- Alleged landowner Pradeep Ghadi Amonkar said he had been trying to get back the land where the Goa club blaze occurred and claimed 25 lives for 21 years

The status of the place where the nightclub was built has been changed to a settlement zone, he claimed.

"How can a salt pan be converted into a settlement zone?" he asked.

Amonkar said he discovered the "zone change" on Thursday while preparing documents to move the high court against the club in connection with the fire tragedy.

A senior Goa Town and Country Planning official said that since an inquiry into this matter is underway, it would not be appropriate for them to respond to Amonkar's allegations at this stage. *—PTI*

GOVT CRACKS WHIP

IndiGo crisis: DGCA suspends 4 Flight Operations Inspectors

MUMBAI, 12 DEC

Aviation regulator DGCA has suspended four Flight Operations Inspectors (FOIs) after massive disruptions in IndiGo's network led to thousands of cancellations and left passengers stranded nationwide.

FOIs, senior DGCA officials responsible for safety oversight, routinely inspect, audit and certify airlines, pilots and crew. A senior official confirmed the suspensions, saying they were linked to the recent operational collapse. FOIs also verify regulatory compliance, supervise training, and enforce flight standards and accident-prevention measures.

IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers and COO Isidre Porqueras have been summoned again by the DGCA investigation panel. Elbers was questioned on Thursday when DGCA teams stationed themselves at IndiGo's headquarters to monitor operations in real time.

The four-member probe panel, Joint Director General Sanjay Brahamane, Deputy Director General Amit Gupta, senior FOI Kapil Manglik and FOI Lokesh Rampal, has been tasked with identifying the root causes of the airline's widespread disruptions.

The committee will scrutinise IndiGo's manpower planning, rostering systems and readiness to comply with the revised flight duty time and rest norms for pilots, which came into effect on 1 November.

The regulator is expected to submit preliminary findings soon. *—PTI*

ONE TRAGEDY AFTER ANOTHER

Rescue work underway after a bus fell off a road and turned turtle, in Alluri Sitaramaraju district, Andhra Pradesh, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

Nine killed after bus plunges into valley in Andhra Pradesh

CHINTURU, 12 DEC

A bus accident in Alluri Sitaramaraju district has resulted in the deaths of nine people and left 23 others injured after the vehicle fell off a ghat road and overturned early on Friday morning. The bus, which was transporting 37 individuals—including the driver and cleaner—was en route to Telangana from the Chittoor area after a visit to Araku.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Amit Bardar reported that the incident occurred at approximately 4.30am on the Chintoor-Maredumilli ghat road, near a Durga temple. "At least nine people were killed, and 23 were injured as the bus fell off the ghat road. It turned turtle... and got stuck," Bardar informed PTI, adding that four of the injured are in critical condition.

The police suspect that heavy fog may have obscured a curve in the road, causing the driver to lose control. The bus plunged from a higher ghat road and landed upside down on the ground below, despite the presence of a China Wall designed to prevent such accidents.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed his sorrow regarding the tragedy and has been in contact with officials to ensure that the injured are receiving adequate medical care at Chinturu hospital and other facilities. *—PTI*

Lone survivor of Arunachal crash battles for life

IMPHAL 12 DEC

The lone survivor of the Arunachal Pradesh road accident that killed 21 labourers has been admitted to Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh in critical condition, officials said on Friday.

Budheswar Deep, 23, was first taken to Tinsukia Medical College and then referred to AMCH for advanced care, Tinsukia Deputy Commissioner Swapnanil Paul said. AMCH Superintendent Dr Dhrubajyoti Bhuyan confirmed Deep had severe head and chest injuries and remained "not out of danger", adding that he was also in shock due to internal trauma.

Deep trekked to the Chipra GREF Camp after the crash, alerting authorities and triggering rescue efforts.

21 workers from Assam died and only one survived after the truck carrying them plunged into a deep gorge in Arunachal Pradesh PHOTO:ANI

A total of 21 workers from Assam's Tinsukia district died and one survived after the truck carrying them plunged into a deep gorge in remote Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh on 8 December. The vehicle was travelling along the Hayuliang–Chaglagam Road with 22 labourers heading for hotel construction work, Defence PRO Lt Col Mahender Rawat said.

Paul said the survivor reached the first hospital at 3pm on Thursday before being shifted to Dibrugarh. A Tinsukia team also reached the accident site and remains in touch with the Anjaw administration.

Recovery work began early Friday, with bodies found inside the truck, which remains stuck in a precarious spot. The Deputy Commissioners of Anjaw and Tezu said 14 bodies have been retrieved.

A pall of grief has descended on the Gelapukhuri Tea Estate, home to most of the victims. *—PTI*

Karur stampede: SC refuses to modify order suspending SIT

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

The Supreme Court on Friday rejected Tamil Nadu government's plea to modify its 13 October order, which suspended the state's one-man enquiry commission and SIT into the Karur stampede that killed 41 people.

A bench of Justices JK Maheswari and Vijay Bishnoi said the decision, reiterating their desire for a fair investigation, currently entrusted to the CBI and monitored by a committee led by former SC judge Ajay Rastogi.

Senior counsel for Tamil Nadu, P Wilson, argued the commission would only provide non-interfering recommendations to prevent future incidents. However, the bench declined to vacate the interim stay.

The court also took a critical view of a report filed by the Registrar General of the Madras High Court, with Justice Maheswari observing, "There is something wrong going on in the high court." The court's previous order had already criticised a High Court judge's actions, including ordering an SIT without hearing all parties. *—PTI*

Should we move to the moon: SC dismisses plea on quakes

"So we should relocate everyone to the moon or where?" the Supreme Court asked on Friday while dismissing a petition which said 75 per cent of India's population is in a high seismic zone and sought directions to the authorities to minimise damage from earthquakes. The petitioner said the authorities should make arrangements to minimise damage in case an earthquake strikes. "That is for the government to take care (of); this court cannot do it. Dismissed," the bench comprising of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said.

Phone tapping case: T'gana's ex-intel chief surrenders

Telangana's former Special Intelligence Bureau chief T Prabhakar Rao, accused in a phone-tapping case, surrendered before at the Jubilee Hills police on Friday as per a Supreme Court directive, officials said. The accused are part of the alleged conspiracy in which they "misused" the resources of SIB for political purposes, police had said. Rao's surrender on Friday came on the direction of the SC. On Thursday, a bench comprising Justices B V Nagarathna and R Mahadevan said the order was passed for the purpose of further investigation into the offences against Rao.

Pulsar Suni among 6 to get 20 yrs RI for actress' rape

KOCHI, 12 DEC

A court here on Friday sentenced six people convicted in the 2017 actress sexual assault case to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment.

Ernakulam District and Principal Sessions Court Judge Honey M Varghese sentenced Sunil NS, also known as Pulsar Suni, Martin Antony, Manikandan B, Vijesh VP, Salim H, and Pradeep to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for gangrape.

The court also ordered imprisonment for other offences, but they will run concurrently.

The court also ordered the victim to be paid Rs 5 lakh, and the pen drive containing the rape visuals should be in the custody of the officer. On 8 December, the court acquitted four accused, including actor Dileep.

The assault on the multilingual actress, after the accused allegedly forced their way into her car and stayed there for two hours on 17 February, 2017, had shocked Kerala. Prime accused Suni raped her and recorded it. *—PTI*

Crime Branch to probe Mamkootathil's sexual assault case

T'PURAM, 12 DEC

The Crime Branch will probe the case against MLA Rahul Mamkootathil for allegedly sexually assaulting a woman and forcing her to terminate her pregnancy, police sources said.

The DGP decided to transfer the case to the Crime Branch, which is investigating another sexual assault case against Mamkootathil.

A team of the Thiruvananthapuram City Police is probing the first case. Now both cases will go to the Crime Branch.

The second case, pertaining to Mamkootathil, allegedly sexually harassing a woman after giving a false promise of marriage is being investigated by a Crime Branch team.

In the first case regarding the alleged rape and forced abortion, Mamkootathil and his friend Joby Joseph are the accused. The Kerala High Court granted Mamkootathil protection from arrest until his anticipatory bail plea is heard on 15 December. *— PTI*

ANTI-PAKISTAN CONTENT

Six Gulf nations ban 'Dhurandhar'

BENGALURU, 12 DEC

Ranveer Singh's spy thriller 'Dhurandhar' may be drawing crowds in India, but it is facing a ban in West Asia. The film has been banned in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE due to its anti-Pakistan content.

Reports said the filmmakers attempted to secure a theatrical release across the Gulf, a crucial market for Bollywood, but clearance was denied.

"There were apprehensions that this would happen as the film is perceived as an 'anti-Pakistan film.' The team still made an attempt. That's why Dhurandhar hasn't been released in the Gulf," a source said.

Earlier, films like 'Fighter', 'Sky Force', 'The Diplomat', 'Article 370', 'Tiger 3' and 'The Kashmir Files' faced similar curbs across the Middle East. Even Fighter, initially released in the UAE, was withdrawn after a day, and a revised version was also rejected.

The filmmakers attempted to secure a theatrical release across the Gulf, a crucial market for Bollywood, but clearance was denied. PHOTO: ANI

- The film has been banned in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE due to its anti-Pakistan content.

But Dhurandhar continues to do well at home. The film has crossed the Rs 200 crore net mark in India within a week and has earned Rs 44.5 crore overseas.

After six years, director Aditya Dhar returned with Dhurandhar, his first film after the 2019 hit 'Uri: The Surgical Strike.'

The project stirred rumours that it was based on Major Mohit Sharma, but Dhar said the story is based on R&AW missions.

Backed by Jio Studios, Dhurandhar is a spy thriller set in Pakistan. The film is centred around spy Hamza Ali Mazari who infiltrates the Rehman Dakait gang in Karachi's Lyari. *—Agencies*

Act in 7 days: Delhi HC on Pavan, Gavaskar's rights plea

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

The Delhi High Court has instructed social media intermediaries to act within seven days on pleas from both Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan and former cricketer Sunil Gavaskar, seeking protection of their personality rights.

Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora noted that both individuals had approached social media platforms regarding their grievances. Kalyan's counsel, senior advocate J Sai Deepak, highlighted his client's concerns over artificial intelligence (AI) videos and impersonation circulating online. The court instructed him to submit the specific URLs for takedown within 48 hours.

Meanwhile, Gavaskar has similarly sought to prevent the unauthorised use of his name and likeness. The court reiterated that both plaintiffs must first lodge their complaints and provide instructions to social media platforms to treat their pleas accordingly under the Information and Technology (Intermediaries Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Several other public figures, have also sought court protection for their personality rights. *—PTI*

WILDFIRE IN NAGALAND

A major wildfire broke out in Nagaland's Western Dzukou Valley in Kohima district on Friday. Dzukou Valley is a biodiversity hotspot renowned for trekking and known for its pristine landscape. Trekking is now banned at the popular tourist destination
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Capital's air is toxic for trees too: DU study

The study found that pollution reduced chlorophyll, made leaves thinner and lowered water content ***PHOTO: PTI***

The capital's toxic air could be detrimental for plant life, reducing chlorophyll levels that are "directly proportional" to the amount of oxygen produced by a tree, a Delhi University (DU) study has found.

Researchers at DU's Acharya Narendra Dev College examined 10 species of trees found widely in the city. These include 'Bael' (Aegle marmelos), 'Saptparni' (Alstonia scholaris), 'Neem' (Azadirachta indica), 'Amaltas' (Cassia fistula), 'Bargad' (Ficus benghalensis), 'Pipal' (Ficus religiosa), 'Pilkhan' (Ficus virens), 'Mango' (Mangifera indica), 'Champa' (Plumeria alba) and 'Jamun' (Syzygium cumini).

The study, titled 'Seasonal variation of biochemical and morphological traits of selected tree species in polluted urban areas of Delhi City' was conducted across four zones, with Ashram marked as a polluted road stretch, Tughlaqabad as an industrial hotspot, Dwarka as a moderately polluted residential area, and the Kamla Nehru Ridge as the least polluted urban biodiversity park.

The methodology section of the study states that leaf samples were collected during monsoon (August-September) and winter (November-December) in 2023. The researchers examined biochemical indicators such as chlorophyll, proline, water content and pH, along with structural traits like thickness and dry matter content.

According to the study, the monsoon period allowed most trees to maintain higher chlorophyll levels, thicker leaves and better water content because rainfall washed dust off the leaf surface and humidity helped the leaves stay hydrated.

In contrast, winter pollution had a greatly adverse impact. The study observed that the dense particulate load in winter reduced chlorophyll more sharply, increased proline levels, made leaves thinner and lowered their water content.

The researchers noted that while monsoon conditions supported recovery and healthier leaf function, winter conditions intensified stress, making biochemical and structural weakening more pronounced.

The study noted that Amaltas and Bargad were among the most pollution tolerant across sites, while Saptparni and Bael were consistently the most sensitive. Mango, Champa, Pilkhan and Jamun fell in the moderately tolerant range.

Chlorophyll enables a tree to carry out photosynthesis, which produced energy out of sunlight and releases oxygen.

Vineet Kumar Singh, an assistant professor in the college and an author of the study, told PTI that the decrease in chlorophyll reduces photosynthesis, which is directly proportional to oxygen production.

Pollutant particles settle on leaves and block the stomata, tiny pores through which leaves release oxygen, disturbing the plant's normal exchange, he said citing the study.

The study says winter pollution affects trees more strongly due to the high particulate load. The seasonal increase in pollution makes leaves thinner, lowers their water content and interferes with their internal balance.

The paper found that proline, which rises when a plant undergoes stress, shoots up during winter at the more polluted sites. Neem, Amaltas and Bael recorded spike in proline at Ashram and Tughlaqabad zones, while those in Kamla Nehru Ridge showed milder increase because of lower pollutant levels.

The study also examined the pH level in leaves to assess their internal environment and functions. Healthy leaves usually maintain a steady pH, while those affected by pollution became more acidic as pollutant particles disturbed normal cellular activity.

According to the study, Jamun at Ashram zone showed one of the lowest pH readings in winter, suggesting stress and altered metabolism.

Relative water content, which indicates how much water a leaf can hold, also fell in several species. The study said Bael, Saptparni and Amaltas had reduced water content at polluted sites because dust-clogged stomata interfered with water retention.

The study also analysed leaf structure and found that leaves became noticeably thinner in winter at high-pollution locations. Neem showed one of the highest dips in leaf thickness, which, according to researchers, is a sign of stress as thinner leaves lose water faster and offer less protection from dust.

Leaf thickness dropped at polluted sites. According to the study, Saptparni recorded some of the thinnest leaves at Ashram and Dwarka in winter, indicating weakened protection against dust and moisture loss. Bargad and Champa maintained greater thickness and were less affected.

Leaf dry matter content, which reflects a leaf's sturdiness, rose in tolerant species like Mango, Amaltas and Jamun. The study says this increase helps these trees reinforce themselves against winter pollution. Species such as Champa and Saptparni, which showed low dry matter content, remained vulnerable. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

It is raining counterfeit products in Delhi

A series of raids across Delhi over the past few months has revealed a disturbing reality -- counterfeiters in the national capital are no longer limiting themselves to luxury knock-offs or small-scale fakes.

From desi ghee to antacid powders, engine oil to shampoo and detergent, and from jeans to school textbooks, the Delhi Police have unearthed a vast and fast-expanding counterfeit economy that is directly infiltrating every home.

"Counterfeiting is a serious offence but our teams are also keeping strict vigil and arrested those who are behind," a senior police officer said.

Since 2023, police have unearthed 740 cases related to the production and sale of fake goods, police said, adding that from January to September this year, a total of 132 cases have been registered under the Copyright Act. The officer said the network has emerged as one of the biggest threats to public health and consumer safety in recent years.

In one of the major raids, police teams in Alipur recovered around 1,500 kgs of spurious desi ghee, packed in tins with labels mimicking popular brands. The product, police said, was nothing more than a mix of refined oil, artificial flavour and low-grade additives that could cause severe digestive and long-term health issues. Along with the stocked product, police seized drums of raw material and packing machines that had been running unchecked for months.

A similar unit in Bawana Industrial Area was later busted, where thousands of litres of adulterated ghee were found stored in unhygienic conditions, the police said. The racketeers were using low-cost vegetable oil blended with chemicals designed to mimic the aroma of desi ghee, they said.

However, the most alarming crackdown came when police unearthed a unit manufacturing fake antacid sachets -- the type used almost daily in households. Officers seized nearly 1 lakh packets along with raw powders, packaging rolls and sealing machines. The packaging was nearly identical to leading brands, making them extremely difficult for an ordinary buyer to detect, the police said.

In another operation, over 1 lakh counterfeit tablets, capsules and ointments, including steroids and pain-relief medication, were recovered from warehouses linked to a wider interstate supply chain. Several illegal factories outside Delhi were also shut following leads generated from the earlier raids, they said.

Delhi's counterfeit market has also not spared daily essentials like toothpaste, shampoo and detergent. A raid in northeast Delhi led to the seizure of over 18,000 fake toothpaste tubes, along with tens of thousands of empty tubes and chemical paste ready for filling. Officers described the conditions as hazardous, with chemicals being mixed in open containers.

During another search, a unit producing counterfeit shampoo, detergent, soap and floor cleaners was busted in Rohini. The products were packaged using fake labels and holograms of major brands and were being supplied to wholesale markets and local shops at cheap margins, they said. Bottled water, jeans and other consumer goods also targeted.

The Delhi Police recently arrested two men for selling fake packaged drinking water, filled using borewell sources and marked with forged trademark stickers. The police said unsuspecting customers consuming the water during hot months were exposed to serious health risks.

In another case, three suspects were arrested for selling counterfeit branded jeans in popular markets. As many as 684 fake items were seized.

Fake automotive products also formed a major share of the recoveries.

In a large-scale bust, the Crime Branch officers seized over 1 lakh counterfeit auto spare parts, including brake pads, clutch plates, spark plugs and bearings. Many were found extremely poor in quality, posing life-threatening danger to drivers and commuters, they said.

In another crackdown, an illegal factory producing fake engine oil under leading brand names was dismantled in Alipur. Police recovered drums of low-grade oil, hundreds of empty bottles, holograms, stickers and packing machines. A separate raid in Anand Parbat led to the recovery of nearly 2,000 counterfeit oil filters along with dyes and printing blocks used for branding.

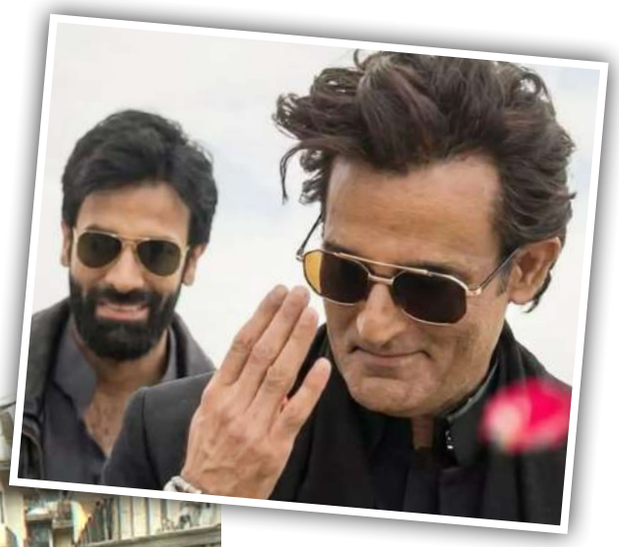
Meanwhile, in one of the year's most financially significant recoveries, police seized over 1.7 lakh pirated NCERT books worth more than Rs 2 crore.

A father-son duo was arrested for running multiple warehouses where textbooks for Classes 6-12 were being printed using low-quality paper and ink.

Police have urged consumers to buy only from trusted sellers, check packaging carefully and report suspiciously cheap products that appear too good to be true. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

'Dhurandhar' draws criticism from Pakistan over inaccuracies



Aditya Dhar's 'Dhurandhar' has triggered a fierce debate in India and even across the border, where the story is set, drawing criticism from Pakistani critics and social media users who claim that the movie has numerous factual inaccuracies and the makers have taken creative liberties.

Released on 5 December, the high-octane spy thriller is directed and written by Dhar. Featuring Ranveer Singh in the lead role, the film follows covert intelligence operations set against a backdrop of geopolitical and terror events like Kandahar plane hijack, 2001 Parliament Attack and 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

The film, which has led to polarising reactions from many critics and people in India, is mostly set in Lyari town of Karachi, an area known for its history of gang wars and violent turf battles.

Now, Pakistani critics, actors and content creators have joined the conversation.

Omair Alavi, a noted film critic and writer, said though the movie is well-made with good performances, its depiction of Karachi and the events of 2007–2008 is not accurate.

"'Dhurandhar' is a well-made film, slick and the acting is also good but it has many factual inaccuracies about Karachi and the period of 2007-2008 shown in the film," Alavi said.

"Our filmmakers are just not willing to make such propaganda films because it is a huge financial risk as when in the past such films were made on patriotic tones, they flopped at the box office," he said.

According to Alavi, they are very few cinema houses left in the country, tickets are too expensive and people are happier watching quality dramas at home.

"As a critic, I can point out many inaccuracies in the movie. But at the end of the day, does the average film goer in India know about these things or even cares about them? For him, it is a slick action movie with big stars and Pakistanis are not good neighbours and thus it is a hit," he added.

Drama actor Qamar Reza said unlike India, propaganda films that were made in Pakistan have always been rejected by the public.

"In Pakistan, when some propaganda or biographic films were made, they were done on low budgets and were badly made, so no one saw them," he said, while claiming that the idea of 'Dhurandhar' seems to be inspired by a 2022 Pakistani movie based on the real-life cop Chaudhary Aslam, who was killed in a car bomb blast in 2014.

In the movie, Sanjay Dutt plays the role of Chaudhary Aslam, while Akshaye Khanna stars as real-life gangster Rahman Dakait. Actor Arjun Rampal portrays Major Iqbal of ISI, a character based on terrorist Ilyas Kashmiri and R Madhavan essays the role of Indian spymaster Ajay Sanyal.

Content creator Bilal Hassan, better known as @mystapaki, summed up the conflicted reaction perfectly.

"It is very, very well-made. Action sequences fantastic, Akshaye Khanna's acting was… I wanted to be upset at it, but I couldn't be upset at it," he said.

But he took issues with the many anti-Pakistan dialogues in the movie. "If that isn't propaganda, I don't know what it is," he said.

He said politics will continue between the two countries but in Pakistan no one wants to take ownership.

He said he had grown up seeing the Lyari gang wars.

"Chaudhry Aslam's house was in front of my school. When there was a bomb blast on top of his house, my school's windows broke. That's how close to home this story was for me.

"We won't tell this story. Why? Because our politicians will get dirty. Our government will get dirty. So instead, we choose to just greenlight sh***y scripts..."

In Pakistan, many viewers have criticised the movie for getting costumes wrong.

Some on social media pointed out that in Pakistan no one wears a half sleeve shalwar kameez, which was worn by Ranveer Singh's spy Hamza in the movie. *—PTI*

Severe blackout affects 1.4M Sao Paulo residents

SAO PAULO, 12 DEC

A severe blackout left over 1.4 million residents in Sao Paulo without power following strong winds that toppled many trees onto the city's electrical grid. Authorities reported no injuries, but the outage led to the cancellation of nearly 400 flights, predominantly at Congonhas airport and Guarulhos International Airport. Utility provider Enel, which has deployed 1,300 workers to restore services, has not announced a timeline for resolution. Mayor Ricardo Nunes criticised Enel as "irresponsible," claiming they were not doing enough. The grid's condition worsened on Wednesday, affecting over 2 million people. Additionally, the power failure is disrupting water services as pumps remain inoperative, according to local water utility. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Crypto mogul Do Kwon sentenced to 15 years for fraud

NEW YORK, 12 DEC

Do Kwon, once celebrated as a cryptocurrency prodigy, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for orchestrating a USD 40 billion fraud through Terraform Labs. The collapse wiped out savings worldwide, with victims recounting financial ruin and some contemplating suicide. US District Judge Paul Engelmayer deemed Kwon's actions as a "fraud on an epic, generational scale," noting its impact on nearly one million investors. Kwon admitted guilt to fraud charges tied to misleading claims about his crypto ecosystem, which prosecutors said caused losses far greater than other major financial crimes. Under a plea deal, he will forfeit USD 19 million and serve his sentence in the US, despite additional charges pending in South Korea. *—PTI*

Ex-Bangla PM Khaleda Zia placed on ventilator

DHAKA, 12 DEC

Former Bangladesh PM Khaleda Zia's health has significantly declined and is placed on ventilator support due to increased breathing difficulties. The 80-year-old was previously treated with high-flow nasal cannula but required further assistance when her condition did not improve. Zia is at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital since 23 November for multiple health issues, including complete kidney failure. Doctors confirmed she is undergoing regular dialysis and blood transfusions. The medical board has urged respect for her privacy amid concerns for her health. Zia was initially set to be moved to London for treatment, but professionals deemed it safer for her to remain here. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Atif Aslam's B'desh Victory Month concert blocked

DHAKA, 12 DEC

Pakistani singer Atif Aslam announced the cancellation of his 13 December Dhaka concert after the interim government denied permission, citing security concerns during the month marking Bangladesh's 1971 independence. Aslam expressed disappointment over social media. The interimn administration led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus is preparing for 16 December celebrations. The country is also gearing up for 12 February 2026 elections after political shifts following the 2024 uprising against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. *—ANI*

UKRAINE MIGHT END IN WORLD WAR 3: TRUMP

Prez is sick of meets: WH; Zelenskyy says US wants free zone

WASHINGTON, 12 DEC

US President Donald Trump said he was tired of people playing "games" over the Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations, warning that "things like this end up in the third world war".

"I'd like to see the killing stop," Trump told reporters in the White House on Thursday. "25,000 people died last month, mostly soldiers, but some people also where bombs were dropped."

"Things like this end up in third world war," he continued. "And I said that the other day. I said, everybody keeps playing games like this. We will end up in a third world war and we don't want to see that happen."

Earlier in the day, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that Trump was "extremely frustrated" with both Russia and Ukraine over the slow progress of his 20-point peace deal.

"The President is extremely frustrated with both sides of this war.

Secretary Leavitt said Trump was "extremely frustrated" with Russia and Ukraine over the slow progress of his 20-point peace deal **PHOTO: TASS**

He's sick of meetings just for the sake of meeting. He doesn't want any more talk. He wants action. He wants this war to come to an end," Leavitt said. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the US wants Ukraine to pull back its forces from the Donetsk region to create a "free economic zone" in eastern Ukraine.

Zelenskyy said that Ukraine had submitted a 20-point set of counter-proposals to the US as part of ongoing discussions on security guarantees with senior American officials, emphasising that any territorial concessions would need to be approved through a national referendum.

The overall peace plan includes a 20-point framework, along with separate documents addressing security guarantees and Ukraine's reconstruction.

The full details of the revised framework, which adjusts an earlier US draft seen as favouring Russia, have not been made public. Zelenskyy indicated that the main points of disagreement remain control of the Donetsk region in the Donbas and the future governance of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, which is currently under Russian control. *—ANI*

Russia oil earnings lowest since Ukraine war: IEA

Russia's earnings from oil exports record lowest in November since the country's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the International Energy Agency (IEA) reported on Thursday. Both export volumes and prices have declined. Moscow earned $11 billion from oil exports in November, a drop of $3.6 billion compared with the same month last year, the IEA said. Ukrainian attacks on Russia's "shadow fleet" cut nearly half of the country's Black Sea seaborne oil shipments.

Don blocks states from framing AI regulations

Trump signed an executive order Thursday aimed at blocking states from crafting their own regulations for AI, saying the burgeoning industry is at risk of being stifled by a patchwork of onerous rules. "There's only going to be one winner" as nations race to dominate artificial intelligence. We have the big investment coming, but if they had to get 50 different approvals from 50 different states, you can forget it because it's impossible to do", Trump added.

Spoken to China, Russia on denuclearisation: Don

Trump on Thursday stated that he has discussed with China and Russia on the denuclearisation of weapons, expressing hopes that all sides could work toward reducing nuclear arsenals. It is something all these countries, which possess the highest amount of nuclear warheads, "would want to do". In October, Trump restarted American nuclear testing after more than three decades after Russia started trials of its Poseidon underwater warhead.

AFTER US' TANKER SEIZURE

Putin, Khamenei back Venezuela

MOSCOW/ TEHRAN, 12 DEC

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed "solidarity with the Venezuelan people" on Thursday amid growing tensions between Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro, and the Trump administration.

Similarly, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Thursday took accused the US of pursuing "territorial expansionism" in Latin America.

The Kremlin said in a statement that Putin spoke with Maduro and "categorically" reaffirmed his support for Venezuelan leader's policy of "protecting national interests and sovereignty in the face of growing external pressure."

Putin said that direct communication between Moscow and Caracas would "remain permanently open".

The call comes a day after American forces seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela.

Meanwhile, Khamenei wrote on X that "Withstanding enemy pressures is Resistance.

The goal of such pressure may be territorial expansionism — like what the US is now doing in some Latin American countries — or it may involve cultural & religious matters, or pressure to change people's lifestyles & their identities".

Meanwhile, the US sanctioned six Venezuelan firms and six Venezuela-flagged ships accused of transporting Venezuelan oil, and members of Maduro's family. *—ANI*

Rwanda-backed M23 kill 400 in Congo

GOMA, 12 DEC

At least 400 civilians have been killed since the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group escalated its offensive in the South Kivu province in eastern Congo, regional officials said, adding that Rwandan special forces were in the strategic city of Uvira.

M23's latest offensive comes despite a US-mediated peace agreement signed last week by the Congolese and Rwandan Presidents in Washington.

"More than 413 civilians (have been) killed by bullets, grenades, and bombs, including many women, children, and young people" in localities between Uvira and Bukavu, the regional capital, the South Kivu government spokesperson said in a statement late Wednesday.

"The forces present in the city are composed of Rwandan special forces and some of their foreign mercenaries, operating in clear violation of the ceasefire as well as the Washington and Doha agreements."

M23 said it had taken control of the strategic city of Uvira in eastern Congo on Wednesday afternoon, following a rapid offensive since the start of the month. Uvira is an important port city on the northern tip of Lake Tanganyika and is directly across from neighbouring Burundi's largest city, Bujumbura. Burundian Foreign Minister Edouard Bizimana said "We have registered more than 30,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in the last three days," as the UN and US called for an immediate ceasefire. *—PTI*

Thailand's Parliament dissolved, elections early next year

BANGKOK, 12 DEC

Thailand's Parliament was dissolved on Friday for holding elections early next year as the country is engaged in a war with Cambodia.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul dissolved the House of Representatives after getting approval from King Maha Vajiralongkorn, whose endorsement became effective Friday after publication in the Royal Gazette.

Anutin had signalled the move with a Facebook post late Thursday saying: "I'd like to return power to the people."

The election must be scheduled within 45 to 60 days, during which Anutin will head a caretaker government.

The move comes at a tricky moment, as Thailand is now engaged in a border war with Cambodia.

Anutin Charnvirakul has been prime minister only for three months. He succeeded Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who served only a year.

Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul gestures as he attends an event at the government house in Bangkok, Thailand, Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Anutin won the September vote in Parliament with support from the main opposition People's Party in exchange for a promise to dissolve Parliament within four months and order a referendum on drafting a new constitution. The party, which runs on progressive platforms, has long been seeking changes in the constitution, emphasising that they want to make it more democratic. *—PTI*

Washington state hit by record floods

MOUNT VERNON, 12 DEC

Relentless rain has caused historic floods in Washington State, stranding families on rooftops and destroying homes. Governor Bob Ferguson declared a state of emergency, urging evacuations as the Skagit River neared record levels.

"We're looking at a historic situation," he said. About 78,000 residents north of Seattle were ordered to evacuate.

The Snohomish River surpassed its previous record by nearly a foot, while the Skagit River topped its record, threatening Mount Vernon.

Helicopters rescued families in Sumas, where water reached 15 feet. Resident Mariah Brosa said, "I didn't think it would come this high." Authorities warn another storm is expected Sunday. *—PTI*

Governor Bob Ferguson declared a state of emergency, urging evacuations as the Skagit River neared record levels **PHOTO: PTI**

Major strike in Portugal hits travel, services

LISBON, 12 DEC

A major strike led by Portugal's two main union confederations disrupted travel and public services on Thursday,

It marked the country's largest protest in more than a decade.

Unions opposed the centre-right government's proposed labour reforms, arguing they would weaken worker protections, while the government insisted the changes are vital for economic flexibility.

Lisbon's usually busy centre was subdued, and widespread walkouts at the international airport forced TAP Air Portugal to operate only 63 of 283 scheduled flights.

Train and bus services were also hit. Cabinet Minister António Leitão Amaro downplayed the disruption, but union leader Tiago Oliveira said the strong turnout showed workers' rejection of the reforms." *—PTI*

FILES SUIT IN HIGH COURT

Reddit fights Aus' social media ban

MELBOURNE, 12 DEC

Online forum Reddit challenged Australia's law banning Australian children younger than 16 from having accounts on social media platforms.

The California-based Reddit's suit filed on Friday in the High Court follows a case filed last month by the rights group Digital Freedom Project. Both suits claim that the law is unconstitutional as it infringes on Australia's freedom of political communication.

"We believe there are more effective ways to accomplish the goal of protecting youth. The Social Media Minimum Age law has some serious privacy issues," Reddit said in a statement.

"While we agree with the importance of protecting people under 16, this law has the unfortunate effect of forcing intrusive verification processes on adults as well as minors, isolating teens from the ability to engage in age-appropriate discussions, and creating an illogical patchwork of included platforms and those which aren't," Reddit added.

The California-based Reddit's suit filed on Friday in the High Court follows a case filed last month by the rights group Digital Freedom Project **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, YouTube and Twitch face fines of up to AUD 49.5 million (USD 32.9 million) from Wednesday if do not remove the accounts of Australian children younger than 16. Australia's eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, the law's enforcer, sent notices to the 10 age-restricted platforms on Thursday, demanding how many accounts of children they had deactivated. ESafety will send six-monthly notices to the platforms. *—PTI*

Pak may ban 'uncooperative' social media platforms

ISLAMABAD, 12 DEC

A Pakistan minister has warned that the government may consider banning social media platforms if they do not cooperate with the authorities.

The Minister of State for Law and Justice, Barrister Aqeel Malik, said this on Thursday, says a 'Dawn' report.

The social media platform X was blocked in February 2024, around 10 days after the general elections.

Speaking on 'Dawn News' programme, Malik, responding to a question about a possible ban on incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan's X account, said "investigations are ongoing."

He added that while the government has contacted X, the platform has not cooperated.

- The popular social media platform X was blocked in February 2024, around 10 days after the general elections were held

Criticising X, he said the platform should not have double standards. "Posts about Palestine are removed within 24 hours. Here, we are talking about terrorism," he said.

He said the government has issued reminders to social media platforms and warned that those that fail to cooperate could face a ban like in Brazil.

On 4 October, he had said that investigations regarding Imran's X account were on and that the platform would be contacted soon. *—PTI*

Rupee slumps to all-time low of 90.49 against USD

The unit settles by 17 paise over its previous close

MUMBAI, 12 DEC

The rupee depreciated by 17 paise to close at an all-time low of 90.49 against the US dollar on Friday, as uncertainty over the India-US trade deal and persistent foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiment.

Forex traders said the rupee is under pressure, largely due to aggressive dollar purchases by importers amid surging global precious metal prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.43 against the US dollar, then fell further to a record intraday low of 90.56 against the greenback, registering a fall of 24 paise from its previous close.

The unit settled the day at 90.49 against the US dollar, down 17 paise over its last close.

On Thursday, the rupee had plunged 38 paise to close at an all-time low of 90.32 against the US dollar.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent higher *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

The rupee is expected to trade with a negative bias as the delay in the trade deal between India and the US may weigh on the domestic unit.

India and the US on Thursday concluded two days of talks, during which both sides exchanged views on trade-related issues, including the ongoing negotiations for a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement.

- On Thursday, the rupee had plunged 38 paise to close at an all-time low of 90.32 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent higher at 98.41.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.02 per cent higher at USD 61.27 per barrel in futures trade.

The latest government released on Friday showed the country's retail inflation inched up to 0.71 per cent in November, from a record low of 0.25 per cent in the previous month, on rising prices of food items.

The Consumer Price Index-based retail inflation remained below the RBI's 4 per cent inflation target for the 10th month in a row. *—PTI*

Novo Nordisk brings Ozempic to India for diabetes

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Danish pharma major Novo Nordisk on Friday launched its blockbuster type 2 diabetes treatment injection Ozempic, globally popular for its weight-loss benefits. Ozempic is now available in India as 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg and 1 mg in 'FlexTouch Pen' - an easy-to-use, once-weekly pen device, at a starting cost of Rs 2,200 per week. Each pen has four once-weekly doses, the company announced here. A patient prescribed Ozempic injection would start with a 0.25 mg dose for four weeks at a total cost of Rs 8,800. Novo Nordisk India Managing Director Vikrant Shrotriya said through Ozempic, the company is looking to provide patients with an innovative and accessible therapy for the treatment of type 2 diabetes while also offering meaningful weight management and long-term heart and kidney protection. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Meta India appoints new public policy head

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Meta India has appointed Aman Jain as its new Head of Public Policy, boosting the firm's policy strategy and regulatory engagement in a key growth market. Jain will be part of Meta India's leadership team and report to Simon Milner, Meta's Vice-President for Policy in Asia Pacific. Meta said Jain brings over two decades of experience across Amazon, Google, the Government of India and international bodies. He previously led Google India's government affairs and public policy and most recently served as Director of Public Policy at Amazon, overseeing competition, technology, marketplace and operations policy. Milner said Jain's expertise would help Meta support India's expanding digital economy and deepen collaboration with policymakers. *—PTI*

Naidu lays foundation for Vizag's IT campus

VISAKHAPATNAM, 12 DEC

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu today laid the foundation stone for a new Cognizant IT campus, along with eight other companies, representing a cumulative investment of Rs 3,700 crore. This initiative is expected to create approximately 41,700 jobs in the region. Cognizant is poised to invest Rs 1,583 crore to develop the IT campus, which aims to generate employment for around 8,000 individuals. During the interim period until the completion of the first phase, Cognizant will operate from the Mahati Fintech Building located in Rushikonda IT Park, Hill-2, where it will centre on AI, machine learning, digital engineering, and cloud solutions. IT Minister Nara Lokesh inaugurated this temporary campus. *—PTI*

Adani Energy acquires KPS III HVDC Transmission

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL) on Friday said it has acquired 100 per cent stake in KPS III HVDC Transmission Ltd from PFC Consulting. This acquisition will further AESL's strategy for enhancing value for its shareholders through organic as well as inorganic opportunities, a regulatory filing said. The company did not disclose the deal value. The project is designed to facilitate the evacuation of 2.5 GW of renewable energy, comprising Phase-V scheme of Khavda which has been planned to enable evacuation of an additional 8 GW RE power from Khavda RE park. The authorized share capital as well as paid-up share capital of KPS III is Rs 1 lakh. *—PTI*

BELOW RBI'S 4% TARGET

Retail inflation rises to 0.71% in Nov on higher food prices

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Retail inflation inched up to 0.71 per cent in November, from a record low of 0.25 per cent in the previous month, on rising prices of food items, government data showed on Friday.

Consumer Price Index-based retail inflation remained below the RBI's 4 per cent inflation target for the 10th month in a row. Also, November is the second month when retail inflation has remained below 1 per cent level in the current CPI series which has data from 2014.

According to data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), deflation in food items was 3.91 per cent in November against 5.02 per cent in October.

The rise in headline and food inflation during November 2025 is mainly attributed to an increase in inflation of vegetables, eggs, meat and fish, spices, fuel and light, the NSO said. Fuel and light inflation for November was 2.32 per cent against 1.98 per cent in October 2025.

ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said a continued base-normalisation and the hardening in prices of some vegetables could make the headline CPI inflation cross 1.5 per cent in the next print, which will be the last before the next MPC.

Low inflation in the current fiscal year has given room to RBI to cut policy interest rates by 1.25 per cent points. *—PTI*

Silver and gold hits a fresh all-time high

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Silver prices strengthened for the third straight day and jumped Rs 5,100 to hit a new peak of Rs 1,99,500 per kilogram in the national capital on Friday, amid sustained global demand for the safe-haven asset, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Silver closed Rs 2,400 up at Rs 1,94,400 per kilogram on Thursday, a day after surging Rs 11,500 on Wednesday.

"In the domestic market, spot silver prices once again recorded a new high, while gold prices also appreciated significantly, trading near the record level," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, said.

In the local bullion market, gold of 99.9 per cent purity increased by Rs 1,110 to Rs 1,33,600 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) compared to the previous close of Rs 1,32,490 per 10 grams, as per the association.

In the international markets, spot gold appreciated by USD 58.61, or 1.37 per cent, to USD 4,338.40 per ounce. Rising for the fourth consecutive day, spot silver rose more than 1 per cent to scale a fresh peak of USD 64.57 per ounce in the overseas trade. *—PTI*

Mexico tariffs to hit India's auto, electronic exports: Expert

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Mexico's decision to sharply raise import tariffs is set to significantly impact India's exports of automobiles, auto components, electronics, metals and chemicals, experts have warned.

The new duties, approved by Mexico's Senate on 11 December and cleared by both chambers of Congress, take effect on 1 January, 2026. They apply to countries without free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

Nearly three-quarters of India's USD 5.75 billion exports to Mexico in FY2025 will be affected. Think tank GTRI said automobiles and auto components, India's largest export segment to Mexico, will face the steepest blow. Passenger vehicles worth USD 938.35 million will see tariffs jump from 20 per cent to 35 per cent, while duties on auto components, valued at USD 507.26 million, will rise from 10–15 per cent to 35 per cent, disrupting supply chains linked to the US market. Motorcycles, with exports of USD 390.25 million, will also see duties increase from 20 per cent to 35 per cent.

Electronics and machinery exports face similar setbacks. Smartphones earlier entering duty-free will attract a 35 per cent tariff, while machinery worth USD 547.99 million will see duties rise to 25–35 per cent. Metals, textiles, chemicals and plastics will also be hit, with aluminium and steel products facing sharp increases.

FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai said the move erodes India's competitiveness and underscores the limited urgency in advancing an India–Mexico trade agreement. GTRI added that Mexico's decision mirrors recent US tariff breaches, further straining the global trading system. *—PTI*

Federal court backs contempt finding against Apple

NEW YORK, 12 DEC

A federal appeals court has upheld a civil contempt ruling against Apple for defying an order to open its iPhone app store to alternative payment systems, while simultaneously allowing the company to impose fees on those rival options. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals confirmed a contempt order issued by US District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, criticising Apple's blatant disregard for her September 2021 findings connected to a legal dispute initiated by Epic Games.

The court ruled that Apple's prohibition from collecting commissions on purchases made through external payment systems was excessively harsh, instructing Gonzalez Rogers to reassess a viable commission rate. The judges provided general guidelines for this review but did not specify a percentage.

Epic Games, the creator of Fortnite, contended that Apple had established a monopolistic pricing scheme in its app store. *—PTI*

Wipro, Microsoft ink 3-year AI partnership

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

IT services major Wipro on Friday announced a strategic partnership with technology giant Microsoft and the launch of Microsoft Innovation Hub at its Partner Labs in Bengaluru, aimed at helping enterprises accelerate adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) solutions across sectors.

Wipro said the three-year collaboration seeks to help enterprises transform into frontier firms – early leaders in AI adoption that are redefining work and unlocking value by embedding AI into core operations. The alliance combines Wipro's consulting-led, engineering-focused capabilities with Microsoft's cloud and AI stack, including Azure, Microsoft 365 Copilot, GitHub Copilot and Azure AI Foundry, as well as integrations with enterprise platforms, to enable businesses to build AI-powered workflows and cultures for sustainable growth at scale. Wipro and Microsoft will co-develop industry-specific AI solutions for financial services, retail, manufacturing, healthcare and life sciences, airports & other verticals.

Microsoft Innovation Hub in Bengaluru will serve as a cornerstone of Wipro Intelligence – a unified suite of AI-powered offerings and platforms – providing collaborative space for clients to engage in workshops, co-innovate AI solutions. *—PTI*

Govt to extend farmer producer scheme for five years

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

The Indian government announced today that it will extend its Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) scheme for an additional five years, from 2026 to 2031, addressing operational challenges that have hindered their growth.

Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi stated at the CII FPO Summit, "About 10,000 FPOs have been formed, but they need guidance and support." Since its launch in February 2020, the scheme aimed to establish 10,000 FPOs.

The government aims to ease compliance burdens under the Companies Act, requesting reduced penalties for organisations still developing their frameworks. Chaturvedi noted, "Working capital remains critical," calling for increased grants from Rs 30 lakh to between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 1 crore to facilitate agricultural operations. He emphasised that genuine FPOs should be officially recognised amid concerns about firms formed merely to exploit benefits.

Empowering FPOs is crucial for capitalising on local agricultural products, thus enhancing farmer returns. *—PTI*

Markets climb amid positive global trends

MUMBAI, 12 DEC

Benchmark stock index Sensex rallied nearly 450 points while broader Nifty closed above the 26,000 level on Friday following buying in metal shares and positive global trends.

Rising for the second day, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 449.53 points or 0.53 per cent to settle at 85,267.66. During the day, it jumped 502.69 points or 0.59 per cent to 85,320.82. Rebounding from the month's low level, the 50-share NSE Nifty surged 148.40 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at 26,046.95.

Among Sensex firms, Tata Steel, Eternal, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro, Maruti and Bharti Airtel were the major gainers.

However, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharma, ITC and Asian Paints were among the laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.14 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.65 per cent. Among sectoral indices, metal surged 2.58 per cent, commodities (1.84 per cent), realty (1.47 per cent), services (1.34 per cent), telecommunication (1.27 per cent), oil & gas (1.21 per cent) and industrials (1 per cent). BSE FMCG emerged as the only laggard.

A total of 2,593 stocks advanced while 1,593 declined and 170 remained unchanged on the BSE. *—PTI*

3-YEAR LICENSING DEAL

Disney invests $1B in OpenAI for AI videos

WASHINGTON, 12 DEC

Disney is investing USD 1 billion in OpenAI and will bring characters such as Mickey Mouse, Cinderella and Luke Skywalker to the AI company's Sora video generation tool, in a licensing deal that the two companies announced on Thursday.

At the same time, Disney went after Google, demanding the tech company stop exploiting its copyrighted characters to train its AI systems.

The OpenAI agreement makes the Walt Disney Co the first major content licensing partner for Sora, which uses generative artificial intelligence to create short videos.

Under the three-year licensing deal, fans will be able to use Sora to generate and share videos based on more than 200 Disney, Marvel, Pixar and Star Wars characters.

AI video generators like Sora have wowed with their ability to quickly create realistic clips based merely on text prompts. But a flood of such videos on social media, including clips depicting celebrities and deceased public figures, has raised worries about "AI slop" crowding out human-created work alongside concerns about misinformation, deepfakes and copyright.

Disney and OpenAI said they are committed to responsible use of AI that protects the safety of users and the rights of creators.

As part of the deal, some user-generated Sora videos will be made available on the Disney+ streaming service.

Children's advocates, however criticised the move. Josh Golin, executive director of Fairplay, said Disney's decision to partner with OpenAI "is a betrayal of countless children around the world who adore Mickey Mouse, Frozen, and Toy Story. OpenAI claims children are prohibited from using Sora, yet here they are luring young kids to their platform using some of their favourite characters." *—PTI*

Lululemon CEO to resign amid US sales slump

NEW YORK, 12 DEC

ululemon Athletica Inc announced on Thursday that CEO Calvin McDonald will leave his position effective 31 January 2026 as the athletic apparel company faces declining sales.

McDonald, who has led the brand since 2018, will assist in an orderly transition and serve as a senior advisor until 31 March 2026. The board has commenced a search for his successor, with chair Marti Morfitt stepping in as executive chair to guide the company during this period.

The announcement coincided with Lululemon's lacklustre third-quarter performance, which showed a 2 per cent decline in net revenue in US against a 33 per cent growth globally. Quarterly profits slipped 13 per cent. *—PTI*

X/@LIVERPOOL

Liverpool boss Slot to hold talks with unhappy Salah

LIVERPOOL, 12 DEC

Liverpool boss Arne Slot said he would speak to Mohamed Salah on Friday morning before deciding on the forward's availability for this weekend's match against Brighton and Hove Albion.Salah accused Liverpool of throwing him "under the bus" and said he had no relationship with the Dutch manager after he was left on the bench for last week's 3-3 draw at Leeds the third match in a row that he did not start. The 33-year-old did not travel for Tuesday's Champions League match at Inter Milan, which Liverpool won 1-0, posting a picture on social media of himself alone in a gym at the club's training ground. "I will have a conversation with Mo this morning; the outcome of that conversation determines how things will look tomorrow," Slot told his pre-match press conference. "I think the next time I speak about Mo should be with him and not in here. You can keep on trying, but there is not much more to say about it.—*PTI*

Indian men's hockey team ends SA Tour with a 4-1 win

STELLENBOSCH, 12 DEC

The Indian men's hockey team remained unbeaten on its tour of South Africa, which comprised two Test matches and one friendly. India began with a 5-2 win, courtesy goals from Shilanand Lakra, Aditya Arjun Lalageand Amit Rohidas in the opening Test on Sunday. Captain Harmanpreet Singh then scored a brace in the second Test on Monday to salvage a 2-2 draw. The visitors wrapped up the tour with a commanding 4-1 victory in the friendly on Wednesday, with goals from Sukhjeet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Hardik Singh, and Mandeep Singh. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Keshav Maharaj to lead Pretoria Capitals in SA20

JOHANNESBURG, 12 DEC

Senior South African spinner Keshav Maharaj was on Friday appointed as the captain of Pretoria Capitals for the upcoming SA20 tournament. Maharaj, who had captained SA in white-ball cricket, has played 40 T20Is in his career, taking 38 wickets. In SA20, the left-arm spinner has taken 27 wickets from 33 matches at an economy rate of 7.3. "One of South Africa's most experienced and respected leaders, Maharaj brings a wealth of international pedigree across formats, along with a proven track record of guiding teams with composure, clarity, and intent," the SA20 said in a media release.—*PTI*

FIFA accused of monumental betrayal

WASHINGTON, 12 DEC

Soccer fans have accused FIFA of a "monumental betrayal" after the latest prices for World Cup tickets began to circulate. The governing body allocates 8% of tickets to national associations for games involving their team to sell to the most loyal fans. And a list published by the German soccer federation revealed prices ranged from $180-$700 for varying group stage games. The lowest price for the final was $4,185 and the highest was $8,680. "This is a monumental betrayal of the tradition of the World Cup, ignoring the contribution of supporters to the spectacle it is," it said in a statement.—*PTI*

Govt must promote domestic production of anti-doping kits: Usha

PT Usha *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Indian Olympic Association President (IOA) and Rajya Sabha member PT Usha on Friday urged the central government to promote the production of indigenous anti-doping testing kits under the 'Make in India' initiative, saying that it will not only reduce cost but also increase transparency.

Usha raised the issue in the Rajya Sabha and said that having to import testing kits leads to delayed results and a reliance on "external agencies". Two Swiss companies, Berlinger and LockCon, are the major suppliers of these testing kits to India right now, according to a well-placed source.

"I want to draw the urgent attention of this house to a matter that affects the integrity of our athletes and the global image of our nation. The need to promote indigenous production of anti-doping kits under the Make in India initiative to help make India a dope-free sporting nation.

"...the menace of doping continues to threaten fairplay, athlete health and our country's reputation on the world stage.

At present, a significant portion of high-quality dope testing kits is imported, resulting in high cost, delay in testing cycles and dependency on external agencies," she said.

India is bidding to become an Olympic host in 2036, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has made it clear that the country will have to considerably improve its current doping record. India ranks poorly in tackling the menace and regularly features in the global top five of dope offenders.

The Minister said NADA has increased its testing capacity considerably and 7751 dope control tests are planned in the current year, a significant increase from the 7474 tests done in 2024 and 5794 tests in 2023.

Usha said having indigenous dope testing kits would be transformative as it would encourage research, manufacturing, and technology development, including sample collection devices and portable detection equipment. —*PTI*

Vaibhav powers India to a big 234-run win

Suryavanshi made a spectacular 171

DUBAI, 12 DEC

India recorded the highest-ever score in Men's U19 Asia Cup history, posting 433/6 in its tournament opener against UAE here at ICC Academy Ground on Friday.

Teenage star Vaibhav Suryavanshi made a spectacular 171, while Aaron George (69) and Vihaan Malhotra (69) contributed with crucial half-centuries. Vedant Trivedi (38), Abhigyan Kundu (32), and Kanishk Chouhan (28) provided the finishing touch to the record total.India moved past its own highest total in U19 ODIs 425/3 scored against Scotland in 2004. Overall, India's total of 433 is the third-highest score ever by a team in a men's U19 one-day game.

Moreover, 14-year-old Vaibhav scored a record-breaking 171 off just 95 balls, shattering the mark for the highest score by an Indian in the U19 Asia Cup. The previous best was Himanshu Rana's 130 against Afghanistan in Colombo in 2016. Soumya Sarkar of Bangladesh holds the record for most runs in an innings in the U19 Asia Cup.

He smashed 209 against Qatar in 2012. Earlier this month, the teenager hit an unbeaten 108 off 61 balls for Bihar against Maharashtra in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy in Kolkata, becoming the youngest player to score a century in the tournament's history.At the Rising Stars Asia Cup earlier this year, Suryavanshi scored 144 off 42 balls for India A against UAE, smashing 11 fours and 15 sixes.

Brief Score:

India 433 for 6 in 50 overs (Vaibhav Suryavanshi 171, Vihaan Malhotra 69, Aaron George 69; Yug Sharma 2/75.

UAE 199 for 7 in 50 overs (Uddish Suri 78 not out, Prithvi Madhu 50; Deepesh Devendran 2/21) —*PTI*

HIGHEST TEAM SCORES IN MEN'S U19 ODIS

- 480/6 by Australia vs Kenya (January, 2002)
- 425/3 by India vs Scotland (February, 2004)
- 425/3 by India vs Scotland (February, 2004)
- 436/4 by New Zealand vs Kenya (January, 2018)
- 433/6 vs India vs UAE (December, 2025)

Vaibhav Suryavanshi *PHOTO: PTI*

FIRST WIN OF WTC CYCLE

NZ beats W1 by 9 wickets in 2nd test; leads the series 1-0

WELLINGTON, 12 DEC

Jacob Duffy, who had to wait until his 31st birthday for a Test debut earlier this year, claimed his second five-wicket haul of the series as West Indies folded tamely on the third day in Wellington. Bowled out for just 128, West Indies left New Zealand a target of 56, which was knocked off before tea for a 1-0 lead in the three-match series with one game to go.

It was New Zealand's first win of the 2025-27 World Test Championships (WTC) cycle. West Indies, meanwhile, have now lost six of their seven outings in this cycle and remain winless. The third test begins on 18 Dec. Duffy claimed his second five-wicket bag of the series as the West Indies were left with an overall lead of only 55 after trailing by 73 runs in the first innings. New Zealand reached 56-1 in only 10 overs, losing Tom Latham (9) along the way. Devon Conway was 28 not out at the end, and Kane Williamson was 16, hitting a four off Anderson Phillip for the winning runs minutes before the scheduled tea break. Pacer Michael Rae and wicketkeeper-batter Mitch Hay also made major contributions to New Zealand's win after being called up to make their test debuts in an injury-hit team.

Jacob Duffy claimed his second five-wicket haul of the series *PHOTO: PTI*

That came after he was called to bowl 43 overs in the second innings of the first test and 60 overs in that match after injuries to Henry and Smith left New Zealand with only two fit pacers.

"I guess to lose (Tickner) like that . . . he bowled great in the first innings, and I thought the way the guys bowled today was awesome," Duffy said. "I thought it was a great team performance and we got the job done. Day three, how good?"

New Zealand 278 for 9 dec (Hay 61, Conway 60, Phillip 3-70) and 57 for 1 (Conway 28*, Williamson 16*, Phillip 1-17) beat West Indies 205 (Hope 47, Tickner 4-32) and 128 (Hodge 35, Duffy 5-38, Rae 3-45) by nine wickets. —*PTI*

India slips to sixth in WTC standings

India on Friday slipped a rung to sixth position on the World Test Championship standings after New Zealand's comprehensive nine-wicket victory against the West Indies in Wellington propelled them to third place. Runners-up in the first two WTC cycles, India were placed fifth after they were blanked 2-0 by South Africa at home last month, with New Zealand occupying the sixth position.

4 Assam cricketers suspended for 'corrupt' practices

GUWAHATI, 12 DEC

The Assam Cricket Association on Friday suspended four players Amit Sinha, Ishan Ahmed, Aman Tripathi, and Abhishek Thakuri following their alleged involvement in corrupt practices during the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy 2025.

The ACA has also lodged an FIR at the state police's Crime Branch against the four players, who have represented Assam at various stages.

They are being accused of influencing and attempting to instigate some of the Assam players who took part in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

"After the allegations came to light, the Anti-Corruption and Security Unit of the BCCI conducted an enquiry. The ACA has also initiated criminal proceedings. Prima facie, there appears to be their involvement in serious misconduct, affecting the integrity of the sport," said Sanatan Das, the ACA secretary.

Assam's SMAT league matches were held in Lucknow from 26 November to 8 December, and they could not enter the ongoing Super League stage. —*PTI*

FIRE NEVER LEFT

Phogat comes out of retirement

NEW DELHI, 12 DEC

Star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat on Friday announced that she would be coming out of retirement to take another shot at an elusive Olympic medal at the 2028 Los Angeles Games, as "the fire never left" her and was merely buried under "exhaustion and noise".

The 31-year-old had walked away from the sport after the heartbreak of the Paris Games last year, where she was dramatically disqualified for being 100 grams over the permissible weight limit ahead of her 50kg category gold medal bout.

She had appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), seeking a joint silver medal, but the verdict remained unchanged, leading her to announce her retirement and join politics to be elected as an MLA from Haryana's Julana constituency."People kept asking if Paris was the end. For a long time, I didn't have the answer. I needed to step away from the mat, from the pressure, from the expectations, even from my own ambitions. For the first time in years, I allowed myself to breathe," Vinesh posted on her social media accounts.

Vinesh Phogat *PHOTO: PTI*

"I took time to understand the weight of my journey, the highs, the heartbreaks, the sacrifices, the versions of me the world never saw. And somewhere in that reflection, I found the truth: I still love this sport. I still want to compete." —*PTI*

Mohammed Ben Sulayem re-elected unopposed to auto racing body

DUBAI, 12 DEC

Mohammed Ben Sulayem was re-elected unopposed on Friday as president of the auto racing governing body, the FIA, after a campaign overshadowed by allegations from his rivals that election rules unfairly kept them off the ballot.

Ben Sulayem's new four-year term, rubber-stamped at the FIA general assembly in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, continues a tenure that has included disagreements with Formula 1 drivers and a high rate of staff turnover at the governing body.

"Thank you to all our FIA members for voting in remarkable numbers and placing your trust in me once again," the former rally driver from the United Arab Emirates said in a statement. "We have overcome many obstacles, but here today, together, we are stronger than ever." —*PTI*

Unnati, Tasnim, and Rounak march into semifinals

CUTTACK, 12 DEC

Indian shuttlers Unnati Hooda, Tasnim Mir, Isharani Baruah, Kiran George, and Rounak Chouhan maintained their strong run at the Odisha Masters to secure semi-final spots here on Friday.

In the men's singles, second seed Kiran stayed solid with a commanding 21-11, 21-17 win over Rithvik Sanjeevi in 33 minutes.

He will next face Rounak, who shocked seventh seed and compatriot Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian 21-19, 22-20 in a tight 41-minute battle.

Indonesia's Muhamad Yusuf got the better of top seed Tharun Mannepalli 21-9, 22-20 in 49 minutes.The women's singles quarterfinals also saw shocks, with Tanya Hemanth defeating third seed and World Junior Championships silver medallist Tanvi Sharma 21-18, 21-17 in 39 minutes to reach the semifinals.

She will face fellow Indian Isharani Baruah, who has been in top form this week. Baruah, who began her campaign with a major upset over second seed Pornpicha Choeikeewong and received a walkover in the next round, extended her fine run by beating sixth seed Anmol Kharb 21-16, 21-14 in 41 minutes.

Top seed Unnati Hooda maintained her dominance with a 21-16, 21-15 win over Anupama Upadhyaya and advanced to the semifinals. Tasnim Mir also produced a strong performance, easing past seventh seed Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese Taipei to complete an all-Indian semifinals lineup in women's singles assuring India multiple medals. —*PTI*

FOOTBALL MAGIC

Hyderabad stadium decked up to witness Messi

KOLKATA, 12 DEC

The RGI Cricket Stadium here is decked up to witness football legend Lionel Messi's spectacular "Penalty Shootout," when his team will take on Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy-led squad in a friendly tie to be held on Saturday evening. According to Parvathi Reddy, advisor to the GOAT Tour Hyderabad, there will be a friendly match between the two teams, Singareni RR9 and Aparna-Messi All Stars.

These two teams will be playing a 15-20 minute friendly match, and five minutes before the match, Revanth Reddy, a football enthusiast and Messi will join and dribble the ball together."There will be penalty shoots to decide who is the winning team.

Each team gets a 3-3 penalty shootout so that they can decide who is the winning team. Messi will be doing it separately on his own. His magic kick will be done to showcase it to everybody," Reddy told PTI.She further said that about 60 people paid Rs 10 lakh to get a picture with Messi, and the amount thus collected will go to the Football Clinic, aiming to providean opportunity to some young players to learn from big names in Football. —*PTI*

Commuters pass by promotional posters and a veiled statue of Argentina's Lionel Messi in Kolkata, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Federer to headline launch of 2026 Australian Open

SYDNEY, 12 DEC

Roger Federer will return to the scene of some of his greatest triumphs in January when he headlines a "Battle of the World No.1s" to officially launch the 2026 Australian Open, organisers said Friday.

The Swiss great will be back on Rod Laver Arena for the first time since he retired in 2022 as the Grand Slam at Melbourne Park introduces an inaugural "opening ceremony".

Held on the evening before the tournament starts on 18 January, it will include a tribute to Federer, who won the Norman Brookes trophy six times among his 20 major titles. He will also join four-time Australian Open winner Andre Agassi and Australians Pat Rafter and Lleyton Hewitt for a star-studded match. "It feels like a lifetime ago that I coined the phrase the 'Happy Slam' for the Australian Open, and it still makes me smile when I think about all the moments I've had there," Federer said. "Coming back to win the AO in 2017 is one of my most treasured Grand Slam memories, and backing it up to win in 2018 was another dream come true in Melbourne." —*PTI*